

# THE NORTHEASTERN ANARCHIST

Theoretical Magazine of the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists

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Platformism  
Without  
Illusions



# THE NORTHEASTERN ANARCHIST

*The Northeastern Anarchist* is the English-language theoretical magazine of the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC), covering class struggle anarchist theory, history, strategy, debate and analysis in an effort to further develop anarcho-communist ideas and practice. Articles published here do not necessarily represent the collective viewpoint of the federation unless otherwise noted.

The Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC) is a bi-lingual (French and English) organization of revolutionaries from the northeastern region of North America who identify with the communist tradition within anarchism. The federation is organized around the principles of theoretical and tactical unity, collective responsibility and federalism. Our activities include study and theoretical development, anarchist agitation and propaganda, and participation within the class struggle.

As anarcho-communists, we struggle for a classless, stateless and non-hierarchical society. We envision an international confederation of directly democratic, self-managed communities and workplaces; a society where all markets, exchange value wage systems and divisions of labor have been abolished and the means of production and distribution are socialized in order to allow for the satisfaction of needs, adhering to the communist principle: "From each according to ability, to each according to need."

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# THE PLATFORM:

## IT'S NOT JUST FOR PLATFORMISTS ANYMORE

by Jeff Shantz and P.J. Lilley (NEFAC-Toronto)

Much has been made over the last few years of renewed activity by anarchists inspired by the 1926 platform. Rather than engaged debate on the issue, discussion has tended to be polarized between defenders of the platform and unwavering opponents of platformism (and so-called organizational anarchism generally). Lost in this polarization is the fact that platformism offer some important insights into contemporary anarchist activity, insights that may be especially useful for non-platformists.

We should begin this discussion by saying that we are not platformists. We have never been platformists and, who knows, we may never be platformists. In fact, over the years we've had our own share of problems with the platform and many arguments with proponents of the platform.

Still, we support the recent emergence of platformist organizations in North America generally, and the activities of a specific platformist federation, *NEFAC*. We also think that platformist actions and ideas have much to offer anarchists in North America, both in terms of their critique of North American anarchist movements and in terms of their positive contributions to the struggle for an anarchist society.

Thus we write this short piece not as boosterism for those who agree with the platform, nor as a rebuttal to those who are opposed to the platform. Instead we write it as anarchists still grappling with the questions and challenges posed by the platform. We are encouraged by the possibilities raised by platformist organizing which builds anarchism outside of our limited circles and in connection with people's everyday lives and struggles under capitalism.

In our view, the burden is on critics of platformism to explain what is wrong with the emergence of anarchist organizations that through their ideas and activities might serve as a pole of attraction for anarchists. Non-platformists have many questions to answer.

Why not draw anarchists together to actively hash out common positions, strategies and tactics? Why not prefer that active

engagement to the comfort of spinning out personal utopias, criticizing from the sidelines or conversely setting aside political differences altogether? What is there to oppose in efforts "to rally all the militants of the organised anarchist movement?" Why oppose attempts to attract working class militants to anarchism?

The goal of developing anarchist perspectives within unions and other working class organizations is one that anarchists have neglected for far too long. And then many anarchists have the nerve to complain about the un-anarchistic character of the working class.

That some non-platformists have responded to platformist organizing dogmatically and reactively, criticizing a document to dismiss a movement, referring to broad generalizations about "organization" rather than specific organizational practices, suggests that some habits are tough to shake. Still it's exactly the habits nurtured during times of lethargy, insularity and marginality that must be shaken off as people are beginning to seek alternatives to capitalist social relations. Not only thoughts of future societies but of real strategies for making it happen are needed.

To begin with, it seems obvious that the original Dielo Trouda concern with overcoming "the miserable state in which the anarchist movement vegetates" is one that must be shared by North American anarchists today, despite the encouraging upswing in anarchist activity recently (of which platformists have played a good part).

As anarchist movements grow the questions of organization and the relations of various anarchist activities to each other and to broader strategies and tactics for social change will only become more significant and pressing. If anarchists are to seize the opportunities presented by recent upsurges in anarchist activity and build anarchism in movements that have resonance in wider struggles, then we must face seriously the challenges of organization, of combining and coordinating our efforts effectively. We will be

aided in this by drawing upon the lessons of past experiences and avoiding, as much as possible, past errors.

One of the glaring errors has been to avoid questions of organization and unity, leaving us woefully unprepared when struggles erupt. When movements are in low ebb and goals are less ambitious, such questions may appear less immediate and the impetus to break out of the protective shell of the subculture less pressing. This has been the situation in North America until very recently.

The changed circumstances in a time of growth for anarchism, and anti-capitalist activities more generally, require new practices suited to the changed dynamics of struggle. As struggles expand and develop, the question is not so much whether people will form organizations or not, but rather the types of organizations that will emerge. People trying to beat capitalism will certainly try to join forces with others to share resources, coordinate efforts and build strength. To stand on the sidelines in such matters is to leave the terrain open to authoritarian and/or reformist organizations to fill the breach.

When one looks at the history of anarchism, organizational perspectives and activities, far from being marginal elements, represent the core of anarchist endeavour. Attempts to suggest that organizational approaches represent some deviation from anarchism or the intrusion of un-anarchist ideas into anarchism are a strange attempt at historical revisionism. Of course, most anarchists are involved in some type of organization or another, whether an infoshop collective, publication team or affinity group.

Much of anarchist activity in North America, unfortunately, still corresponds with the Dielo Trouda description from 1926: "local organizations advocating contradictory theories and practices, having no perspectives for the future, nor of a continuity in militant work, and habitually disappearing, hardly leaving the slightest trace behind them." Absence of durable anarchist organizations still contributes to a drift into passiv-



ity, demoralization, disinterest or a retreat into subculturalism.

Many of these short lived organizations are built on the synthesist basis that platformists have been and remain so critical of. While we're not convinced that synthesist approaches must fail, in my experiences they do exhibit a tendency to be the "mechanical assembly of individuals" which the platformists suggested. Such groupings work relatively well as long as their level of activity doesn't rise above running a bookstore, infoshop or free school. Unfortunately, even in those cases disastrous rifts emerge when meaningful political questions are broached. A consensus based on not wanting to offend other members or declining controversial work because it threatens collective harmony are too often the default positions of synthesist type groups.

Platformists seek a substantial unity based on shared action and reflection. Platformism encourages a political and theoretical honesty. One can take a stand without having to compromise or soft peddle one's positions in order to keep the peace.

Discussion of unity perhaps requires some clarification. When platformists talk of theoretical or tactical unity they are not saying that everyone has to read the same things or agree on all points. Surely, however, there has to be some agreement on basic ideas. And these positions are only determined collectively, through open debate and discussion rooted in actual experience. Unity speaks to a focused sharing of resources and energies that brings currently limited anarchist forces together rather than dissipating and diluting our efforts.

Of course it's always easier to avoid the collective work, the lengthy debate and discussion, the development and revision of ideas through practice and finally the legwork of organizing that platformists take on. It's also easier to develop pure schemes in the comfort of one's apartment, rarely worrying oneself whether or not such beautiful fantasies "would inevitably disintegrate on encountering reality." Platformists, on the other hand, accept the shared responsibilities of building anarchist movements in connection with those who suffer the assaults of capitalism.

The anarchist organization is a place to come together and reflect on work being done. It offers the opportunity to examine and refine one's practices and explore alternatives and options given the resources and experiences at hand.

It seems to us that the important thing about platformism isn't found in the specifics of a 1926 document but in the challenge that it puts before us to come together openly

and seriously to develop anarchist strategies and practices in a way that is engaged in real class struggles against actually existing bosses, landlords and bureaucrats. Platformists have taken up the challenge of moving anarchism from its current status as social conscience or cultural critique. This is exhibited in the work being done by platformist groups in tenants' unions, workplaces, anti-poverty actions and fighting deportations to name only a few.

These actions, based upon serious debate and an estimation of the capacities to do the work properly, have moved the discussion of organization out of the clouds of speculation and brought it to the ground of everyday practice.



**"It is time for anarchism to leave the swamp of disorganization, to put an end to endless vacillations on the most important tactical and theoretical questions, to resolutely move towards a clearly recognized goal, and to operate an organized collective practice."**

*- Organizational Platform of Libertarian Communists, 1927*

They have taken it from comfortable abstraction to practical reality based on the experiences of people living under actually existing capitalism.

Of course, the platform is simply a "tactical and theoretical orientation" and platformist organization is the bringing together of those who would develop that orientation through their practice. Thus it is always open to re-appraisal as circumstances suggest.

It's important to keep in mind that the platform was only ever intended as a beginning, "as the first step towards rallying libertarian forces." Far from being a fully fleshed out program of action it provides only "the outlines, the skeleton of such a programme." Its authors recognized its many gaps, oversights and inadequate treatments.

Part of anarchism's growth must include a commitment to developing visions and practices that can build anarchist movements rather than just "scenes" or cliques. If platformism offers a starting point for this process then it makes a welcome and necessary contribution to anarchism in North America.

Anarchist hobbyism is not much better than the hobbyism of stamp collecting or bird watching. Hobbies offer their practitioners moments of freedom, self-expression and relief from the daily grind but they don't do much to keep the shit from piling up. Anarchism can do better than that and must do better than that. This is what platformism recognizes and it attempts to take anarchism

out of esoteric hobbyism.

Anarchism must move from the realm of speculation to the terrain of possibility. In giving a serious impetus to this movement, platformist organizations offer much to anarchist efforts in North America.

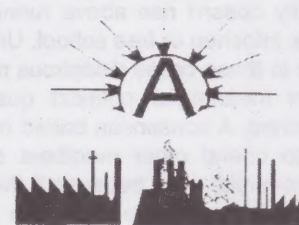
#### NOTES

(1) As well this will not be an exposition of the platform's positions. Those accounts can be found elsewhere in this issue or in Nicolas Phebus' fine article "As Far as Organization Goes: We are Platformists" [NEA#3]



# THE GLOBAL INFLUENCE OF PLATFORMISM TODAY

## Workers Solidarity Movement



*It is appropriate that we begin our series of interviews with platformist-influenced groups from around the world with the Workers Solidarity Movement. Through years of anarchist organizing in Ireland and a consistent internet presense, the WSM is largely responsible for the resurgence of interest in platformism among English-speaking anarchists. They happen to be one of the groups which NEFAC maintains the closest ties with internationally, and have been very influential to the overall political development of our federation.*

*Below is an interview with Alan Mac Simoin, Deirdre Hogan, Gregor Kerr, Andrew Flood and Conor McLoughlin, all members of the WSM's Dublin group.*

**- interview by MaRK, Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)**

**What is the history of the WSM? When did you form, and under what circumstances? Did the original founding members come out of other existing anarchist, socialist or left-republican tendencies active in Ireland?**

**WSM:** Up to the 1970s there was no real anarchist history in Ireland. In the mid '70s small anarchist groups were formed in

Belfast, Dublin, Dundalk, Cork and Limerick. These groups mainly consisted of people who had returned from living abroad. Most of these groups, while calling themselves anarchist, had no real concept of working together as a group and most only existed for months rather than years. The exception to this was the Belfast group, which founded Just Books (a political bookstore which lasted over a dozen years). The Dublin group which existed at this time fell apart due to having no real group coherence.

Over the subsequent years, various attempts were made to try to pull something together again. In 1982, people from Dublin, Cork and Ballymena started discussion around the area of defining what they meant by anarchism and how to relate to the 'national question' and to the trade unions.

Out of this series of discussions was born the *Workers Solidarity Movement*. The founding members did not come, as a group, from any existing political or anarchist tradition. This was the first conscious attempt to establish an anarchist organization in Ireland which would have agreed principles and a long-term perspective, and began with just five people.

One problem which emerged in the early years was that much more debate/discussion took place about tactics than about goals. Thus, by 1987 the Cork branch had quadrupled. But it turned out that many of these people had joined with no great understanding of what anarchism was. This led to the Cork branch becoming a collection of 'activists' rather than convinced anarchists, and in the end most Cork members left, with a few of them turning to Bolshevism.

From this episode, WSM realized the need for having a clear recruitment policy and the need for people to have a good deal of political agreement before joining the organization.

**How did members of your organization first become interested in platformist ideas and methods of organization? What led to this theoretical development?**

**WSM:** From 1968-69 onwards there was much analysis of the failures of the anarchist movement, particularly in France and Italy, where we began to capitalize on the years of political turmoil of the late sixties. Many anarchists began to see the need for some degree of political organization. This thinking transferred to Britain, where a significant number of anarchists started to move towards platformist politics.

But it seems that many of the people involved were so burnt out or disillusioned by their bad experiences that they were really looking for something outside of anarchism altogether, and some of them ended up in Leninist organizations. That experience does not appear to have been replicated in any other country.

Our interest in platformism has become known worldwide. A lot of this is due to the development of the internet and our use of it. And because the WSM is now 17 years old and quite clearly still anarchist, this dispels the myth that platformism is about getting out of anarchism, or moving towards Leninism.

**How would you say platformism informs the practical activity of the WSM?**

**WSM:** On a day-to-day level platformism allows the WSM to put forward a coherent, consistent set of political beliefs, and allows us to tie our involvement in particular campaigns – against war, against unjust local service charges, for abortion rights, against 'social partnership', etc. – to our anarchist politics. By this we mean that we emphasize that our



opposition to the bin charges (increased taxes on garbage pick-up), for example, is linked to our opposition to an unjust society and to our belief that a better society is possible. We never hide our anarchist politics.

It also means that we continually debate and discuss politics – both the theory and the practice – as we strive for theoretical and tactical unity. By theoretical unity we mean that members agree on a certain number of basics. There wouldn't be much point in having an organization in which half the members believe that trade union struggles are crucially important, and the other half think that they are a waste of time. It might make a good debating club, but the organization would be totally hamstrung in trying to make effective political intervention in day-to-day working class struggles. Neither would the organization be very effective if half the organization think that trade union struggle is important and the other half agrees that if they say so it must be, but never actually bothers to discuss/debate the issue. Thus internal education is an integral part of our organization – both in terms of political theory and in terms of practice (i.e. the particular tactics which may or may not be successful in any given campaign).

This process is only useful however if it leads to action. When we discuss issues/campaigns, if we decide to prioritize a particular thing (e.g. anti-war work), we do so as an organization, rather than as individuals. Once a particular issue is prioritized, all the members agree to commit themselves to it for the duration of the campaign, where possible, and the tactics and potential of the campaign are discussed regularly at our meetings.

This leads to collective responsibility, meaning that each member will support the decisions made by the organization. Without this type of commitment/agreement, decisions made might look very good on paper but would be totally useless in practice. There wouldn't be much point in our discussing at length how to intervene in the anti-war movement, for example, and then not bothering to actually as individuals attempt to do our best to carry out the decisions made. This does not of course negate the right of members who disagree with the majority view to express their own views. In doing so, however, they must make it clear that they are not speaking on behalf of the organization. Where a group of people in the organization disagree with the majority view, they have the right to organize and distribute information so that their arguments can be heard within the organization as a whole.

Part of our anarchism is the belief that debate and disagreement, freedom and

openness strengthen both the individual and the group. This of course distinguishes us completely from Leninism – a form of political organization which does the complete opposite (i.e. which discourages and opposes internal debate and disagreement and in which the 'line' is handed down from the central committee).

Our form of political organization makes no attempt to impose a monopoly over members' political lives, but recognizes that, as individuals, members may be involved in any campaign in which they have an interest (unless of course it is something which conflicts with basic anarchist principles) but we recognize that having a group of people/an organization which is agreed on a number of basics increases the strength and effectiveness many times over. At all times, of course, political struggle has to be viewed through the eyes of the class struggle (i.e. our fight is not against the State as an abstract institution but against the State as the executive arm of the ruling class).

***A point of debate among platformist-influenced groups is centered around the relationship between anarchist organizations and trade unions. What is the WSM's relationship to the trade union movement in Ireland? How would you answer to the criticisms (made by some revolutionary anarchists and ultra-left Marxists) of trade unions being inherently non-revolutionary?***

**WSM:** We would, of course, agree that trade unions are "inherently non-revolutionary". If we only participated in things that were revolutionary we could quickly find ourselves sitting on our butts doing nothing. Trade unions in general are not designed to be revolutionary, anarcho-syndicalist ones may be but even here there are huge practical difficulties [see next question].

Certainly in Ireland – the major unions are designed purely to fight on bread and butter issues. To even describe them as 'reformist' would be to imply that they have a goal to change society. They don't, they are simply trade unions – no more. There is a "political levy" which goes straight to the Irish Labour Party, which, in this country, could possibly be termed "a party of the middle class" (in the sociological sense of the word anyhow).

We do advocate that members join trade unions and participate in them. This is not at all because they are revolutionary organizations or even that they have any such potential.

At the most basic level joining a union implies that workers have different interests from the boss. The reason that unions sur-

vive is that workers recognize, rightly, their need to band together to defend themselves. For most that's as far as it goes – unions are organs of self-defense for workers under capitalism. But it's a very important step to see this basic class interest.

Secondly, of course, the most organized and militant workers will, usually, gravitate towards unions. As class struggle anarchists we should be there with them. Union membership is high in Ireland though it is also declining quite fast.

In 1980, union membership as a proportion of those in work was 61.9%, since then it has declined to 44.5% in 1999. Though union membership has risen, it is rising much slower than the rate of new people coming in to work and a huge proportion of the private sector especially the tech sector is un-unionized.

As stated, unions are little more than organizations to defend and improve people's lot under capitalism. In Ireland over the past few years this role has been further limited by social partnership and a lack of democracy.

Social partnership is a system which dictates wages and working conditions along with other vague aspirations which are combined into a national plan between unions, bosses, government, farmers and the "poverty industry". In practice this has frozen shop floor organization and increased the power of the bureaucrats. People now see very little point in going to union meetings when everything has already been agreed nationally with the bosses. Further the union heads have swallowed draconian restrictions on the right to strike and picket under the industrial relations and public order acts. These have now been used very effectively against strikes, most recently in Dublin airport where eight activists have recently been fined for breaking an injunction to picket in the City Jet Strike.

The lack of democracy in some of the large unions is striking, which only has biennial conferences and where the membership is miles removed from the highly paid full time bureaucracy. The WSM (with some non party individuals) is probably the only group, which has tried to raise lack of democracy in union structures/rule books as an issue in itself. It seems to be a fairly low priority for the Leninists.

In practice we encourage members to join unions where possible. We have several members in private sector un-unionized employment. Here the best tactic seems to be to lie low – but to try to organize people collectively even to pursue small issues. Companies in this sector always operate on the basis of individual contracts – so breaking this down is a step. To actually go from this to trying to unionize would probably be



only possible on the basis of some real victory for the collective non-union efforts.

We have active membership in the *SIPTU* education branch and the *INTO* (primary teachers union) – our members there have had some success in industrial actions – noticeably in Trinity College in a recent successful *SIPTU* fight for pensions for part time cleaners (this was supported by most college workers including many non unionized ones). With very little on the ground activism it is possible to have a real impact with a couple of members, but some of this impact is due to low activity with the left taking up the slack.

Our long term hope is to create active rank and file groups cutting across unions, sectoral barriers and on union employment. At this point that goal looks quite distant.

**What is WSM's position on anarcho-syndicalism? Do you see independent revolutionary anarchist unions outside of existing mass-based trade unions as a viable strategy at this stage of class struggle in Ireland?**

**WSM:** In general we think the ideal form of union organization is syndicalist. This form of union organization would be a vast improvement on the unions in place at the moment. We are not an anarcho-syndicalist organization though, and do not see our goal as setting up anarcho-syndicalist unions to overthrow capitalism.

In our view syndicalism (at least historically) has failed to address the issue of political power. We believe that to make a revolution it isn't sufficient that workers just seize their workplaces and the land. They must be organized right across communities and workplaces to smash state power and replace it with workers' councils. This requires revolutionary anarcho-communist organizations dedicated to this goal. The workers from day one must abolish all power relations.

Syndicalism doesn't create the revolutionary organization required to do this. It creates trade unions. As stated these are miles better than other unions but still unions by design. It organizes ALL workers regardless of politics (recently some anarcho-syndicalists have decided to organize ALL workers EXCEPT for Leninists and Trotskyists in their industrial networks – this is surely even MORE of a recipe for disaster!).

Many workers will (rightly) join these unions because they use the most radical tactics and get the best results. They won't join them because they are revolutionary anarchists or anywhere close. For this reason syndicalism has been dogged with reformist currents. Spain in 1937 was the high point of

syndicalist organization. Because the *CNT* would not address the issue of political power they managed a situation of dual power – workers controlled factories and fields but the government was left. In the end the ruling class managed to get it back together and used the state to smash workers power. Some of the *CNT* higher ups even joined the government and these were from the "radical" *FAI* anarchist wing of the union designed to keep it politically anarchist!

In practice we recognize that syndicalist unions are miles ahead of others, and – on the positive side – members of anarcho-syndicalist unions are likely to be exposed to anarchist ideas. We would seek to join but maintain our anarcho-communist organization alongside them, as we would do in any union.

In the last couple of years in Ireland there was an attempt to set up a left split from the *ATGWU* in Ireland. This is the *Independent Workers Union*. Though they still aimed to have full time officials (or at least a full time leader!), it did embrace some syndicalist ideas and it did appear to be a hopeful development. It since appears that two left wing bureaucrats who were kicked out of the *ATGWU* were really using them as pawns in an internal struggle. As the new *ATGWU* leadership will probably reinstate these it is hard to know what will now happen. The *IWU* has a fair sized paper membership in Cork – but, as far as I know, most kept *ATGWU* union cards as well. They managed to get a negotiating license held by another small butchers' union. Whether this would have stood up is unclear as the Irish government makes it very difficult to get negotiating rights. We await developments.

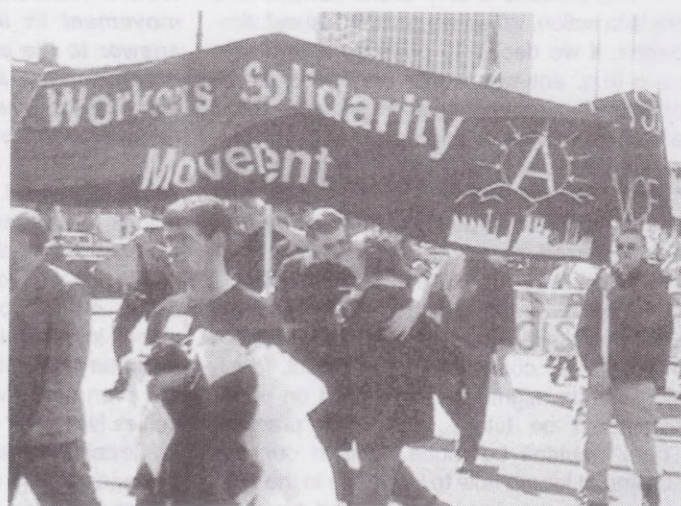
There is an added practical difficulty with attempting to establish an anarcho-syndicalist union here. Unlike in the US where any group of workers can – in theory at least – set up their own union, here the process of establishing a union is fraught with legal minefields including the need to be issued with a negotiating license by the State.

Meanwhile we have and seek good relationships and practical solidarity with a huge number of anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist organizations world wide. We take no side on the numerous disputes that have emerged within the *IWA* and other groups over the past few years.

**Outside of trade union activity, a lot of WSM's activity is based around community organizing (water taxes, bin charges etc). What have you brought to these struggles? How effective has your organizing been in these areas?**

**WSM:** Firstly two general points. There are a huge number of community, church, women's and voluntary groups in Ireland. By their very nature community groups tend to be organised around the members of a community. This means that groups cannot just parachute in and start arguing their politics from on high. Generally, the only way to be really involved in a community group is to be active within that community! Sorry to state the obvious, but it's a point that is often NOT appreciated by Leninist and reformist groups.

Secondly, many community groups in Ireland have also been co-opted into the whole idea of "partnership". Once community groups begin to have full time paid staff and become dependent on government or European Union funding, they lose site of their initial (often radical) aims and democratic structure. Many so-called community groups are now just part of a well paid network which might be best described as the



**WSM contingent at an anti-war protest, Dublin 2002**

"poverty industry". Although some may be very well-meaning, they are not functioning community groups answerable to local people. Only real struggle on local issues tends to draw together and revitalize tenants' and community groups. The bin charges and water charges campaigns have to some small extent done this in a few parts of Dublin.

Our experience with the *Dublin Federation* of campaigns that beat the water charges was a good one. This federation was, at least in theory, based on representatives from local groups throughout Dublin.



It mobilized very large demonstrations, fought court cases and maintained high non-payment in the three council areas that make up the greater Dublin area. Water charges were abolished.

The lesson we drew from this was that local organizing, involving and empowering people and giving them a say in the campaign is the way to go! The lesson drawn by the reformist/Leninist members of the *Socialist Party* was that the election of one of their members was the main factor. In fact, he was elected AFTER the charge was beaten and his election was linked to the massive mobilization that beat the charges. The successful grassroots campaign beat the charges AND built an electoral base.

The Trotskyists put the cart before the horse and decided that electing a TD (Irish member of parliament) was the crucial factor. Now the *Socialist Workers Party* has joined the *Socialist Party* in attempting to build electoral machines. Of course we argued long and hard against this in the campaign and gained respect for our ideas from many people who would have considered anarchism as a loony bin philosophy. Unfortunately, the electoral road seems quick and easy and the long-term disempowerment isn't always readily viewable.

The water charges campaign worked as a federation. It was a VERY imperfect federation – dominated by the *Socialist Party* and with many local groups that were just paper tigers. But it did contain several highly active ones.

So far the campaigns against bin charges have been almost completely top down. For example, in Dun Laoghaire the *Socialist Party* and *Socialist Workers Party* have informally split the area. Neither side has any interest in building local groups and leaflets are centrally planned and designed and then handed to people to be given out. In the city center area, with *WSM* participation, there are a couple of active local groups where we have members living but, again, the campaign in general works top down. We have also found (in fairness) that in the absence of any major council threat building local groups is not that easy. There just isn't any reason to get involved and people expect the campaign to function as a sort of insurance service for which they pay a few euros.

Long term, though, the main problem in Dublin is the domination of the two Leninist groups who look only to recruiting members/voters. This is worrying not only because it is not the way to involve or empower anyone, but also because it means a hollow campaign with no in depth membership beyond Trot full timers. If the council go on the offensive we may pay the price.

***WSM has been very active around abortion rights in Ireland (campaigning heavily against the recent anti-choice referendum, supporting the Women on Waves project, etc). In what ways have you tied this activity into more traditional class struggle anarchism?***

**WSM:** Due to the high cost involved in travelling to England for an abortion, it is working class women who are most effected by the lack of access to abortion in Ireland. Both in our own propaganda and within broadbased pro-choice groups we have always argued that, because of this, the lack of abortion rights in Ireland is a class issue. Within broadbased pro-choice campaign groups we have also pushed for grassroots activism such as door to door leafleting, as opposed to political lobbying and media stunts.

***Although the WSM is the oldest formal anarchist organization still active in Ireland, new groups such as the Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation (ASF) and Anarchist Federation Ireland (AFI) have recently formed. What is your relationship to these organizations?***

**WSM:** Unlike Leninists, we don't see other anarchist groups as 'rivals'. Our basic approach is to work hard to keep good relations going between the anarchist groups in Ireland despite the political differences that exist.

In recent times we have co-operated very successfully with both the *ASF* and the *AFI* – as well as with other anarchists and libertarians – in campaigning against the Nice Treaty (i.e. the latest phase of the European Union project). We are also currently working very closely with them in building support for direct action against Irish involvement in the U.S. war against Iraq.

Some of the people in the *ASF* were in *Organise!* before so we have had a relationship with them for over a decade which has included organizing joint lecture tours, summer schools and providing speakers for each other's meetings. At times in the past we have had joint internal discussions which have included looking at possible grounds for unity.

The *AFI* formed more recently. Our political differences with them would be wider on day to day issues, particularly on the question of involvement in mass organizations of the working class, e.g. Trade Unions. This has not however stopped us from working with *AFI* members in a number of campaigns to date.

Apart from these organizations we put a fair bit of effort into promoting and maintaining good relations within the wider anarchist movement which includes many individuals

who are not members of any anarchist group. This has included initiating with others a series of island wide 'Grassroots Gatherings' which happen every 4 to 6 months in a different city. Last summer it included two anarchist summer camps which were really social rather than political gatherings. It also included starting the mailing list Irish Anarchism which is now moderated by members of both the *WSM* and *AFI*.

***What sort of international relationships do you have with other platformist anarchist organizations? What prospects do you see for the development of platformism within the international anarchist movement?***

**WSM:** We should start by pointing out that as a very small organization our general approach has been that we do not have the resources to sustain any sort of real membership of a formal international organization. And we think 'pretend' internationals whose sole role is to inflate the self-importance of local groups do more harm than good.

So our formal relationships are very weak. We exchange publications with around 35 other organizations internationally. We are asked to do more exchanges but for financial reasons restrict ourselves to organizations that are either 'platformist' or strike us as particularly important.

More recently we decided to join *International Libertarian Solidarity*. This however is a network intended to facilitate solidarity between different libertarian groups rather than an international of national sections.

On a less formal level we have contact with a number of organizations, including *NEFAC*, which are possible only because of access to the internet, sharing a common language and the travel of individual militants. Until the time when several really large platformist organizations exist that have the resources to fund translation, travel and international conferences then much of our international work will depend on such informal contacts.

We have made one effort to formalize this a little bit through the setting up of an email list called 'Anarchist Platform'. This list is intended to allow militants of the different organizations (and those for whom there is no local organization) to communicate news and ideas.

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# ANARCHIST FEDERATION

This is an interview with Nick and Bonnie, two founding members of the Anarchist Federation (AF) from London. The AF has been around for nearly twenty years, and was instrumental in assisting with the early formation of NEFAC (and, of course, they continue to be a large influence on us!). Over the years the AF has made important contributions to anarcho-communist theory and practice within the English-speaking anarchist world, and, although they do not explicitly define themselves as a "platformist" group per se, there is a strong critical influence present in their organizational activity.

- interview by MaRK, Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)

**Could you give brief a history of the Anarchist Federation? When did the group form? What was the political background of the founding members?**

**AF:** The Anarchist Federation, or rather its precursor the Anarchist Communist Federation, formed in 1985, shortly after the last great miners' strike. It coalesced around the Libertarian Communist Discussion Group, which distributed stocks of the "The Organizational Platform of Libertarian Communists", left over from the days of the Anarchist Workers Association (AWA) and Libertarian Communist Group (LCG). The emphasis was on building a platformist style organization in Britain, and in building an organization built on class struggle and anarchist communism. We rejected anarcho-syndicalism, and felt that *Class War* was too much into the stunt-politics built around a few strong personalities and too little theory and too much post-punk posing. Two of us had been active in French libertarian politics previous to the founding of the organization. One was a veteran of the movement since 1966, who had been active in the *Anarchist Federation of Britain*, the *Organization of Revolutionary Anarchists* and its avatars, the

AWA and LCG. Two of us initially had a brief history with leftist groups (primarily the *Socialist Workers Party*), and moved to libertarian politics as a result of our experiences. The AF emerged out of a merger of the *Libertarian Communist Discussion Group*, and the magazine 'Virus'. 'Virus' then became our mouthpiece [later changing its name to 'Organise!'], so we were then able to gather other militants around us and set up the ACF.

**From the early development of the AF, there seems to have been a strong platformist influence in how you viewed questions of revolutionary organization, however this seems less pronounced in more recent literature produced by the federation. Do you consider the AF to be an explicitly 'platformist' organization? How influential would you say 'platformism' has been to the federation's political development?**

**AF:** No, the AF is not an explicitly "platformist" organization. It is informed by its politics fairly significantly, and it acknowledges the main points of the Platform (tactical and theoretical unity, federalism, and collective responsibility). But a lot has happened since 1926 - the critiques of capitalist society coming from the women's movement, the lessons to be learnt from the theory and practice of council communism, of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and its British counterpart *Solidarity*, the whole post 1926 experiences of French and Spanish anarchism - *FCL*, *ORA*, *OCL* (first and second), *UTCL*, etc., and the failures of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism, the *Friends of Durruti*, the experience of British libertarian organizations (pre-war with the *Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation*, post-war with the *ORA*, *AWA*, *LCG*, etc.) and we cannot run on the spot. We have to address capitalism as it is now and the relevant ways we can organize to fight it. But yes, the Platform is a significant and important document and any revolutionary anarchist organization that is at

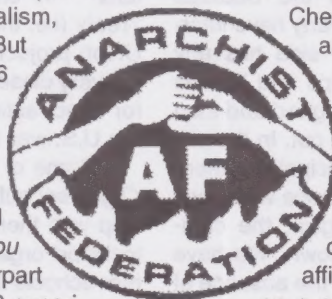
all serious has to take account of it, without being obsessed by it.

**The AF currently has active groups in England, Wales, Scotland, and now Ireland. How do these groups relate to each other? What level of coordination is there between localities? How much autonomy does each group have within your federated structure?**

**AF:** Each group organizes on a regional basis within the framework of the AF. There is a healthy discussion via our Internet List, our internal Bulletin, our Delegate Meetings and Conferences. There's been an 'Anarchist Dayschool' in Scotland, and one coming up in Ireland. There is autonomy for each section within the federalist structure and any area or group can obviously bring out its own publications and pamphlets (as indeed they do).

We thought the comments by a member of the Irish WSM regarding the AF's internal organization in the last 'Northeastern Anarchist' ["An Irish Anarchist In the Northeast: Reflections on the North American Anarchist Movement" by Chekov Feeney] were pretty crass and showed a distinct ignorance of the way we function. The AF structure is not at all like the NEFAC structure, where a number of collectives affiliate to the NEFAC federation. And to say that collectives and individuals affiliated to the NEFAC structure on a semi-member basis is like the AF structure is totally erroneous, because that doesn't happen. Each member has to agree with our ideas and is met by AF members before they join.

Of course, an organization [WSM] with two branches that function in cities with populations of 150,000 (Cork) and 1.2 million (Dublin) can act in an apparently more cohesive way, especially when the Leninist movement in that country is not significantly larger than the anarchist movement. But we are faced with organizing in many cities and are faced with a Leninist movement to be num-





bered in the thousands, who have certain hegemony over political mobilizations. We have become the largest anarchist organization in Britain, and anyone can see who looks in depth that there is a cohesion and coherence to our politics and activities.

**How do you view the current state of the anarchist movement (and broader 'anti-capitalist' milieu) in Britain and Ireland? How much impact or influence would you say the AF has had within the larger movement?**

**AF:** The movement in Britain and Ireland is still immensely weak, still struggling to get out of the anarchist ghetto. There is still a strong anti-theoretical bias, and still an obsession with spectacular stunts in some quarters. Similarly, there is still a distinct anti-organizational prejudice among many, with some extolling the virtues of local organization (as if local organization and strong organization on a territory were mutually exclusive!). There is still much work to be done, to reach say, the strength and implantation that anarchists have in France.

**What is your political relationship to other class struggle anarchist organizations in Britain (Class War, Solidarity Federation) and Ireland (Workers Solidarity Movement, Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation)?**

**AF:** Sure we work with other class struggle anarchists where and when we can, for instance *AF-Ireland* has recently produced a joint bulletin with the *Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation*. But it's fair to say that apart from punctual collaborations (benefits, etc.) there's been not much collaboration even at the level of organizing united blocs on demos. We've done our best in the past to make this come about, but there's only so much you can do if there is reluctance for this to happen.

**There seems to be a strong council communist influence in some areas of the AF's politics, specifically around your critical position on trade unions and anarcho-syndicalism. What strategies of workplace resistance and self-organization does the AF promote in place of traditional union strategies?**

**AF:** Well, you printed our strategy on workplaces in the last issue of your magazine ["Workplace Resistance Groups"; NEA#5]. So let that speak for itself. Our position we feel to be correct and born out by experience (look at the recent maneuvers by the Fire

Brigades Union to dampen down the firefighters struggle as a concrete example). We don't call on workers to leave the unions en bloc, but neither do we counsel anarchist militants taking positions in the unions. We found the recent articles in 'Northeastern Anarchist' on taking positions as organizers within the unions to be pretty appalling. You'll end up being totally taken over by the unions.

Look what happened to Rose Pesotta and plenty of other anarchists who adopted this line in the past. They ended up keeping their anarchism quiet, supporting the war effort in World War II, and generally operating as a non-parliamentarian type of social democrat if you will. You have to offer specific anarchist communist politics in the struggle, not do the work of the unions for them. What matters is the autonomous organization of the working class, and to think this can be done via the unions is an error.

**What are some campaigns or struggles where the AF has made successful interventions? Current activity?**

**AF:** Well we did a lot of work around the Poll Tax struggle at the time. We produced two pamphlets and a number of leaflets and stickers addressing that struggle. The Trotskyist organization *Militant* had a grip on many areas of the struggle, but we feel we had some influence. Of course bringing out 'Resistance' on a monthly basis with an ever-increasing distribution and circulation allows us to influence people who have never come across anarchist ideas before, and there is a steady increase in requests for more information about us and revolutionary anarchist ideas in general as a result of this. We are doing a lot of anti-war work at the moment, and no doubt will do even more in the future.

**The AF certainly played an active role in the formation and early development of NEFAC. What sort of international relations do you maintain with other anarchist groups around the world?**

**AF:** We take international work extremely seriously and have a number of international secretaries in contact with many groups and organizations around the world. We joined the *International of Anarchist Federations* (IAF/IFA), and have attended all their congresses and international meetings

**Finally, I can't help but ask why you decided to change the name of the federation (from Anarchist Communist Federation)?**

**AF:** The name change did not mean we gave up our anarchist communist politics. We didn't change our Aims and Principles! Anyone who reads our publications will soon realize we put over an explicit anarchist communist viewpoint. It's not so much what you call yourselves as a group or organization, but what you do or say. We

remain libertarian communists. The old name was a mouthful and you were mistaken for a weird amalgam of Stalinists and libertarians by those who didn't know any better and we wasted a lot of time explaining what we were about. We haven't degenerated into some vague libertarian position. It soon becomes apparent to those who come into contact with our ideas what we are about and we would say that we have introduced many to the ideas of anarchist communism for the first time.

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## THE ROLE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION

ANARCHIST COMMUNIST FEDERATION





# Alternative Libertaire



*Alternative Libertaire is the third largest anarchist organization in France today, after the syndicalist CNT-Vignolles and the synthesist Fédération Anarchiste (FA). Influenced by platformism, their chief aims are to further develop a class struggle anarchist tendency and to help the emergence of a large self-managed, anti-capitalist, working class movement. Alternative Libertaire has consistently nurtured a strong working relationship with NEFAC's Quebec Regional Union during the three short years of our federation's existence, be it through press exchanges, discussion on the internet or actual visits. Below is an English translation [thanks Nic! - ed] of an interview with Laurent Scapin, the secretariat of international relations for Alternative Libertaire.*

*- interview by Nic, Bête Noire (NEFAC-Montreal)*

**When was Alternative Libertaire formed?**

**AL:** Alternative Libertaire was formed in 1991, on the basis of the 'Manifeste pour une Alternative Libertaire' (which can be read at our website in French, English and Arabic). The goal was to create an organization that could go beyond the small libertarian communist groups of the time. Consequently, two components were the principal contributors to the formation of Alternative Libertaire: l'Union des Travailleurs Communistes-Libertaires (UTCL), which was primarily made up of libertarian syndicalists, and le Collectif Jeunes Libertaires (CJL), a youth organization.

**Reading Alternative Libertaire (monthly magazine of the organization) or Débattre (theoretical magazine), we see very few references to platformism. Does AL consider itself a platformist organization as such?**

**AL:** Arshinov's Platform and "platformism" are indeed a part of our "ideological bag-

gage". But we're not attached to them in a dogmatic way. We think that part of the text, written in the 1920's, is now obsolete and is not adapted to the political realities we live with in France today. That is why we rarely make references to 'The Platform' or to platformism. We identify with the spirit of platformism, and say so, but we don't identify with every word written in the original platform! We are still convinced of the importance of anarchists being organized, and to also have a clear political and strategic line. To that effect, yes, we are platformists.

**What areas of struggle is Alternative Libertaire most active?**

**AL:** A wide question, because the militants of Alternative Libertaire are active in many social movements. In unions, first, and in particular with the alternative unions of Groupe des 10-Solidaires. For us, the struggle of workers, direct victims of the capitalist system, remains central. Unionism, syndicalism and interventions in workplaces are thus fundamental. The rail workers of Alternative Libertaire produce a workplace bulletin, for example.

We are also present in many other movements: anti-fascist, anti-racist (including support for non-status immigrants), anti-sexist and anti-militarist (we are particularly involved in mobilizations against war: it's important to remember that Alternative Libertaire was constituted during the first Gulf War, so it's a big issue for us), ecological (against nuclear energy, for example), movements of the unemployed and precarious workers. Another important area of intervention is our international activity. It consists of international solidarity through our participation in the ILS (International Libertarian Solidarity) network, occasional support actions, and support for the anti-colonial struggle in Palestine. It also consists of our participation in the anti-globalization movement. We are right now mobilizing against the next G8 summit, which will take place in France in June 2003.

**During the last French presidential elections, we heard that you called on the voting population to vote for Chirac (right) against Le Pen (far right), can you explain to us the context within which this choice was made?**

**AL:** We didn't call to vote for Chirac. But we didn't call for abstention either. We called that not one voice, and in particular a worker's voice, be for Le Pen, which is totally different. We respect the autonomy of all local AL groups, and some took a position in favor of voting for Chirac, but that wasn't a majority position nationally. The militants of Alternative Libertaire are active and convinced anti-fascists, and we know that above all it is social struggles that can push back the far-right. That's mainly what we expressed, much more than on the fixed question in the second round of voting. A minority of militants from Alternative Libertaire, myself of them, think however that the ballot box can sometimes, when necessary, be an anti-fascist weapon, as during the last presidential elections.

**Can we understand that you reject anti-electoralism, a traditional anarchist position?**

**AL:** A position on elections is a totally secondary tactical decision compared to social struggles. It's quite surprising to see anarchists spending hours talking about elections when we give them so little importance. We think we have a non-dogmatic position about voting. Although we think nothing positive will come out of them for the exploited, we also think that very negative things can. We positioned ourselves on elections because we feel concerned by these issues. But we consider every situation, without any prior reasoning.

**Considering unionism and syndicalism, there exists a wide variety of unions and syndicalist organizations in France (at**



**least by North American standards). Does AL as an organization have a particular preference for one type of unionism or do your members get involved with the union that make the most sense at their workplace?**

**AL:** What's most important is the organization of workers against the bosses. For us, a union is a tool of mass struggle that goes beyond political divergences (anarchists, Communists, and more importantly the large mass of non-politicized people). The militants of *Alternative Libertaire* are unionized in all kinds of labor organizations (*SUD* and other unions of the *US-G10*, *CNT-Vignolles*, *CGT*, *FO*, *CFDT*), in connection with what's going on the ground and within the company. We don't have any kind of union policy, and we scrupulously respect the autonomy of labor movements.

We work in unions to impel struggle, and to push positions that are democratic and advance social change. That's why we are more comfortable in alternative and rank and file based unions like *SUD*.

**About revolutionary organizations, what is your relationship with the other political anarchist organizations that are active in France? We are thinking particularly about the *Fédération Anarchiste* (FA)...**

**AL:** Until two years ago, relations between the different French anarchist organizations were really tense, even prone to open conflict. But things have changed a lot. We now have cordial relations with the *Fédération Anarchiste*. We meet regularly, locally as well as federally. That's how we were able to make common proposals in preparation for the anti-G8 mobilizations in France next June.

Our relations are also much improved and have clearly increased with the *No Pasaran* network and *Organisation Communiste Libertaire* (*OCL*), thanks to our international work. Our three organizations are members of the network *International Libertarian Solidarity* ([www.ils-sil.org](http://www.ils-sil.org)). We work really closely together on these issues, which allows us to create relationships of confidence and helps minimize conflicts.

A good example of these new relationships between anarchist organizations is "le Forum Libertaire de Montreuil" (the anarchist forum of Montreuil, which is an east Parisian suburb), which brings together *Alternative Libertaire*, la *Fédération Anarchiste* and the *CNT*. This forum is a common voice, and the first meeting last June brought together about a thousand people, which is a first for the anarchists in Montreuil.

Another initiative that was unthinkable a few years ago: *Alternative Libertaire*, la *Fédération Anarchiste*, le réseau *No Pasaran*, *CNT-Vignolles*, l'*Organisation Communiste Libertaire* et l'*Organisation Socialiste Libertaire* (Switzerland) met to gether to prepare opposition to G8 meetings, discussed openly and accepted to work as a whole in the same direction!

**On the other hand, we can imagine that the heritage of a strong and organized anarchist movement (as it is the case in France) brings benefits to today's anarchist organizations. What is the influence of having worked with important theoreticians such as Daniel Guérin from the time of the *Union des Travailleurs Communistes Libertaires* (UTCL) or Georges Fontenis within AL today?**

**AL:** We hold today a rich theoretical heritage. One of the past weaknesses of the anarchist movement has been to either perpetually reinvent the wheel by forgetting it's past, or refuse to get out of a sacred anarchist dogma, which doesn't permit advancement. People like Daniel Guérin broke with

of the Spanish *Confederation General del Trabajo* (*CGT*) to share reflections on our struggles, to network the international relations that everyone has bilaterally, and to support concrete projects of international solidarity that prove that anarchists can build on a day to day basis.

The current projects are supportive of South America. In Uruguay, we are helping the *FAU* finance a free space in Colon, and a truck for street propaganda. In Brazil, we're helping the *FAG* finance the construction of a community hall in Sepe Tiaraju, the creation of an anarchist press and the reconstruction of the warehouse for a cooperative of (steel) recycling workers. In Argentina, we support our *OSL* comrades publication 'En la Calle'. Our network now has about twenty organizations and we've already given, together, many thousand dollars to our South American comrades.

**Finally a big question. How do you see the future of the international anarchist movement?**

**AL:** At the last AL conference, in November 2002, we've noticed a qualitative and quantitative progress of our organization. We've moved one step ahead. However, we're still far away from bringing about the project of a true anarchist left, a revolutionary project that has a real political impact. But things are advancing politically. The formation of the *ILS* network, the capacity of the main French anarchist organizations to regroup and work in the same direction

on the anti-G8 mobilization are encouraging signs. But at the same time, we also see the limitations. We're lacking spaces of debate, to confront ideas, to elaborate collectively. You always progress better being numerous than alone.

It's not a question here of falling into bureaucratic slips. But if our tendency wants to profit from today's struggles and from the development of our ideas, we must invent new forms of common work.

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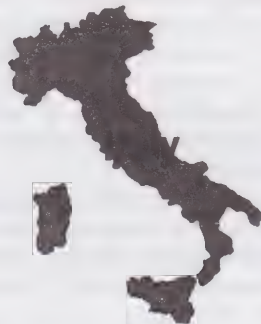
**Alternative libertaire**  
**à la fête de de l'Huma**  
13, 14, 15 septembre au parc de la Courmeuve  
**stand à la Cité du livre**  
presse, librairie et matériel militant  
**anticapitalisme ★ autogestion**

these vicious circles and made it possible to rethink our struggle along a non-sectarian basis. Unfortunately, for years this has been misunderstood by other components of the French anarchist movement...

**You participate in the International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS), an international network of anarcho-communist and anarcho-sindicalist organizations that seeks to help the material development of the international anarchist movement, notably the Latin American movement. Can you explain briefly the projects of the ILS?**

**AL:** The *International Libertarian Solidarity* network was formed in 2001 on the initiative





# Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici

Federation of Communist Anarchists of Italy

Although considerably smaller in numbers than the synthesis-oriented Italian Anarchist Federation (FAI), the *Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici* (FdCA) has provided an important pole for class struggle anarchists in Italy for over fifteen years now. They are an explicitly platformist group, and maintain a high level of organizational discipline throughout the federation. Since our formation, those of us from NEFAC have kept semi-regular contact with the FdCA, and, incidentally, they were one of the groups whose organizational model we studied prior to our founding conference. Below is an interview with Donato Romito, the FdCA's international secretary. English translation by Nestor McNabb (A-Infos Collective, Rome).

- interview by MaRK, *Class Against Class* (NEFAC-Boston)

**Anarcho-communism has a long history and tradition in Italy, going back to the 1870s, however it seems that most of today's anarchist groups trace their history to the struggles of 1968-69. Were any of the older anarcho-communist tendencies able to survive the period of fascist reaction and influence the newer generations of anarchist militants? Also, what is the specific history of 'platformist' tendencies in Italy?**

**FdCA:** It was 1968-69 when the older members of the FdCA first appeared on the political scene, the years of the workers' and students' movements. Clearly they could not remain unaffected by the strong libertarian, but above all class, elements expressed in those movements. When they approached anarchism, they found there the *Federazione Anarchica Italiana* [Italian Anarchist Federation, FAI], a synthesis organization, which apparently offered a space but which in reality was not an organization but a collection of individuals of a

rather individualist tendency. However, historical readings on Italian and international anarchism showed us that there was instead a continuous line of class-struggle, communist anarchism starting with the First International and proceeding through the social struggles in most parts of the world at the start of the twentieth century, the anti-Bolshevik and anti-Stalinist struggles not to mention the work carried out by anarchists both before and after the Russian Revolution, the Red Years in Italy, the Mexican Revolution and of course the Spanish Revolution.

In Italy, the continuity of anarchist communism was disturbed by various events, the most disastrous of which was without doubt the economic influence of that Italo-American anti-organization and non-classist anarchism linked with the journal *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* during the fascist and post-war period. One form of "rebellion" against that tendency which had taken over Italian anarchism during the 1950s was the creation of the organizational *Gruppi Anarchici di Azione Proletaria* [Proletarian Action Anarchist Groups, GAAP].

These groups had some excellent members, but fell apart after they were "kicked out" of the world of "official" anarchism by the FAI. Luckily, despite the "excommunications", many of these comrades continued their class-struggle activity and when they were tracked down at the beginning of the Seventies, were able to pass on their experiences and provide a link between the two periods.

It should also be remembered that, at that time, we were geographically close to the French experience with the *Organisation Révolutionnaire Anarchiste* (ORA) and the Spanish groups who were reorganizing against Francoism and, later, following the death of Franco. To sum up, it was the union of these forces which enabled the birth of territorial groups during the Seventies which could take up the reins of communist, class-struggle anarchism in Italy, and allow this tendency to enjoy greater visibility.

At the same time, a revision of the history of Italian anarchism was taking place. Starting with the excellent studies made by Masini (not by chance one of the most prominent militants in the GAAP) a series of studies were started, above all by our anarchist communist comrade Dadà. Her volume *"L'anarchismo in Italia: fra movimento e partito"* ["Anarchism in Italy: Between Movement and Party"] was a turning point in studies on Italian anarchism. It highlighted not only the communist basis of anarchism but also the original theorization of the principle of "organizational dualism" [1] which had its highest level of theorization in Italy during the First International, from Bakunin to certain correspondents such as Celso Cerretti, to whom Bakunin wrote a letter clarifying this question (republished together with a lot of other material in the book).

Regarding Platformism in Italy, Dadà provided new material which brought new light to the history of anarchism which had up to that point been centered on the role of Malatesta, a synthesis mediator for all tendencies. With the publication of memoirs relating to the Paris meetings, it was discovered that Fabbri, Fedeli and others had been in contact with Arshinov. Even studies on the fascist period, both on the comrades in prison or confined and on those exiles who had fled death, demonstrated further the continuity between the communist, class struggle anarchism of a large part of the anarchist movement in the pre-fascist period and the debates of those years.

To simplify, it can be said that the choice of name of the *Federation of Anarchist Communists* had some significance, particularly in the light of the rediscovery of the previous attempts to found similar organizations - the *Unione dei Comunisti Anarchici d'Italia* [Union of Anarchist Communists of Italy] in 1919 (which unfortunately melted into the syncretist *Unione Anarchica Italiana* [Italian Anarchist Union, UAI]) and the



*Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici* [Federation of Anarchist Communists] in 1944 which unfortunately withdrew into the synthesis *FAI* [Federazione Anarchica Italiana]. The comrades of the anarchist communist tendency which rose again at the start of the '70s for the most part did not allow themselves to be drawn into the *FAI*, despite the polemics which this organization often stirred up in an attempt to discourage their attempts at organization, and the result is a project which has lasted right up to the present day.

**When did the FdCA first form? What social movements or anarchist groups did the original founding members come out of?**

**FdCA:** The *FdCA* was born in 1986 when the *Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica* [Revolutionary Anarchist Organization, *ORA*] united with the *Unione Comunisti Anarchici Toscana* [Tuscan Union of Anarchist Communists, *UCAT*]. *ORA* had been in existence for 10 years and had sections in several regions of Italy. *UCAT* had been active in Tuscany for 5-6 years. The *FdCA* is the most recent and most successful Italian anarchist communist organization since 1986.

**How is the federation organized?**

**FdCA:** The *FdCA* is a federation of militants, and sections are formed by several militants in the same town. As an organization, the *FdCA* is founded on shared ideological elements. There is, therefore, unity on theory, unity on basic strategy and political strategy and general agreement on tactics. Debate is ongoing as far as political strategy and tactics are concerned, which influences the definition of the organization's program. The political activity of militants is governed by the principle of collective responsibility. The decision-making body is the National Congress, where decisions are made on our political theses, on our press, our internal bodies (such as editorial teams, various committees) and where we elect the Council of Delegates which runs the organization between congresses and which respects the decisions of congress. Comrades are elected to the Council of Delegates on both a territorial basis and a political basis. The Council of Delegates then elects a National Secretariat which has the task of represent-

ing the organization and coordinating the activities of the federation.

**In what areas of struggle is the federation active? How would you say that 'platformism' informs your activity within these struggles?**

**FdCA:** The *FdCA* is active above all in the areas of the unions, anti-militarism, environmentalism, the fight for self-managed social spaces and the anti-globalization movement.



*FdCA contingent during Genoa anti-G8 protests, July 2001*

Platformism characterizes our activity in four different ways:

- (1) a strong class-struggle and unity-of-class approach to the struggles;
- (2) careful, detailed analysis of those in struggle and the state of the struggle;
- (3) the search for common, collective policies as a result of debate within the sections;
- (4) our application of the organizational principle of multiple membership, whereby we draw clear distinctions between the tasks and roles of the proletariat's mass organizations and the political organizations of anarchist communists, where confusion and overlapping between the two is avoided and where the activities of anarchist communist militants are informed by this.

**What is the FdCA's relationship to the organized Italian workers' movement (the COBAS, the anarcho-syndicalist USI or mainstream trade unions)?**

**FdCA:** Most *FdCA* militants are active within the labor movement, both within the *CGIL* [2] and in the radical grass-roots unions [3]. Today, the working class is divided between three traditional unions and five or six grassroots unions. We are not interested in a war between unions as class unity is a fundamental aspect of our strategy and something which goes beyond fidelity to any particular trade union. This is why we try to promote coordination committees of delegates, territori-

al coordination and coordination of libertarian union activists: to achieve a more radical syndicalism with libertarian principles. Several of these grassroots unions contain "cobas" in their name [4], but they differ from the *COBAS Confederation* which in our opinion is a somewhat confused collection of union, political and cultural layers. Then there is the *USI* [Unione Sindacale Italiana], which maintains its ideological identity as an anarchist union.

**How about other anarchist groups such as the FAI?**

**FdCA:** As we indicated earlier, dealing with the *FAI* has always been difficult. Although it is numerically larger and has its press (the weekly 'Umanita Nuova'), the *FAI* has always been distant from class struggle and the workers' movement. Recently, however, it has begun to pay more attention to labor issues and a series of debates and common initiatives have been developed between the *FAI* and the *FdCA*.



*Italy has a history of extra-parliamentary groups (including anarchists and autonomists) which have carried out armed actions against the State. How do you view these isolated "direct actions" carried out by individuals or small groups? Is there a place for this type of activity within the revolutionary project?*

**FdCA:** Anarchist communists have always rejected armed struggle as the expression of elitist, clandestine, self-appointed vanguards which are detached from the very proletariat they are trying to provide an example of how things should be done. In this way, they create a truly authoritarian relationship between the so-called leading vanguard and the working class. Political assassinations can destroy in moments years and years of unglorious work in the class struggle.

Of course, Italy is one of those countries where the State has always made an instrument of armed struggle, turning it to its advantage, provoking it, or simply allow-

popular support. These are of course illegal actions carried out by thousands of workers who, for the time being, have managed to impede any repressive action on the part of the State.

When repression does strike, as with the post-Genoa investigations, mass mobilizations have been the response, leading to the release of the comrades who were arrested.

**Does the FdCA maintain international ties with other platformist groups?**

**FdCA:** Sure, we have stable relationships with most of the organizations for whom the Platform was an inspiration, both in Europe and further afield. We consider the AP list to be most useful for international debate and on the occasion of Genoa 2001 we promoted a meeting between Platformist organizations. We believe that an international network of cooperation between anarchist communist organizations would be a most valuable tool. At the moment, the FdCA is part of the *International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS)* project together with other libertarian political

campaign against the war in Iraq. Our policy is to build mass anti-militarist committees which operate according to libertarian principles where there can be the greatest possible participation of all those who oppose war, armies and capitalism.

On the union front, we will be working in the fight against the law which seeks to permit the freedom of dismissal for the bosses, together with the fight connected with the renewal of national work contracts in various sectors involving nearly five million workers. We will be part of the movement in defense of non-religious, pluralist, state education against the reform of the education secretary. Although we are part of the anti-globalization movement, we do not take part in the Social Forums. We are organizing our 3rd National meeting in June (you are all invited, by the way!). Then for the future, our most ambitious project is the usual one - to develop and nurture the Federation.

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*Outside of the FdCA's second annual 'Libertarian Alternative Festival' in Pordenone, July 2002*

ing it to take place. The Italian State even "used" the dramatic events in Genoa in 2001, with the complicity of the Black Bloc, particularly its foreign elements. In a revolutionary context there can only be room for the armed struggle of the working class, wherever the physical survival of the class and the revolution is threatened. In recent months the road, railway and port blocks by those Fiat workers threatened with redundancy have attracted widespread

groups and class struggle unions.

**What is some of the current activity of the federation? Future plans?**

**FdCA:** Each FdCA section has its own activities in relation to the territory it is part of, as the Federation views itself as a political force in relation to the movements and other political groups. In the short term, we will obviously be busy with the anti-militarist

## Translator's Notes:

[1] The original Italian expression is "dualismo organizzativa" and refers to anarchist membership in both specific anarchist organizations and general, mass labor organizations.

[2] The largest confederate trade union in Italy, traditionally linked with the Italian Communist Party.

[3] Sometimes known as "base unions", like CIB Unicobas, RdB, Sincobas, etc.

[4] "Cobas" is an abbreviation of the Italian "comitato di base", or base committee.





# Organizace Revolučních Anarchistu - Solidarita

With the collapse of Soviet Communism and growing dissatisfaction with capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe, a new generation of revolutionaries from former Soviet-Bloc countries has come to embrace anarchism. NEFAC has maintained fairly close relations with Organizace Revolučních Anarchistu - Solidarita, a relatively young organization with a similar political orientation to ourselves from the Czech Republic. This is an interview with Vadim Barák and Jindrich Lukas, two active militants from ORAS. Part of this interview was originally conducted in 1998, and printed in *Red & Black Revolution* #4 (theoretical magazine of the Workers Solidarity Movement). Additional questions appear here for the first time.

- interview by Kevin Doyle (WSM-Cork) & MaRK, Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)

**What sort of history do anarchist ideas have in the Czech Republic?**

**ORAS:** Anarchism started here in the 1880s as a youth section of a patriotic and liberal movement against the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. When the *Social Democratic Party* was established, its left wing was represented by libertarian socialists, but after several years they were forced to break away. Until WWI the most powerful libertarian current was anarcho-syndicalism. A stronghold of Czech anarcho-syndicalism was in the Northern Bohemian mining regions. Anarcho-syndicalists were soon organizing their own union federation, the

*Czech General Union Federation* (the CGUF). Repression by the state strangled the CGUF in 1908, but could not destroy the syndicalist spirit among workers and new syndicalist unions like the *Regional Miners Union* were formed.

By 1914, the *Federation of Czech Anarcho-Communists* (the FCAC) was also well established among Czech workers. Syndicalists and anarchists published a lot of papers such as 'The Proletarian'. Anarchists established some consumers' co-ops. During WWI there was a general clamp-down on the Czech libertarian movement - a lot of militants were either jailed or marched to the front; many were killed. Unlike syndicalism, the FCAC survived the war.

In 1918, on 14th October, the FCAC's militants, together with left Social Democrats, organized a 24-hour general strike that in fact marked the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's domination of our nation. This event made Czech nationalist politicians, who did not want to break away from the empire until that moment, start negotiations with the empire about our independence. Strikers were demanding our right to national independence and a creation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. After a day the strike was called off by the Social Democratic leadership. On October 28th, ordinary people - mainly in Prague - rose up again to finish off the decaying Austro-Hungarian authorities.

At that time the leading anarcho-communist intellectuals were already moving towards Leninism. One of them became an MP in the parliament of the new republic and another was a minister of the first govern-

ment. On the other hand it tells a lot about anarcho-communist influence at the time. In 1918 the anarcho-communists became the left wing of the *Czechoslovak Socialist Party* (the CSSP). In 1923, anarcho-communists were expelled from the CSSP and their leaders maneuvered them into a last step before an open unification with the *Communist Party* (CP), which had already been established in 1921 by left Social Democrats and left anarcho-communists, who openly converted to Bolshevism (in fact they were the first here to translate Lenin's works.) This last step led to the formation of the *Independent Socialist Party* (the ISP). In 1925 the ISP, despite resistance from the last remnants of syndicalism - the *Association of Czechoslovak Miners*, which was tied to the anarcho-communists - abandoned federalism and other anarchist principles and joined the CP.

**Was there anarchist activity in Czechoslovakia in the lead up to the Velvet Revolution (1989)?**

**ORAS:** Yes, there was an anarchist minority in an illegal party called the *Left Alternative* (LA). This party was very small and composed mainly of intellectuals and students who belonged to various currents of democratic and revolutionary socialism. They opposed the Communist regime and pursued a program of socialism based on workers' self-management and direct democracy. As freedom of speech and association did not exist, the LA remained confined to being a more or less discussion group, not an organization active among working class people.

During the Velvet Revolution the LA gained some credibility among ordinary people, and in Prague - the center of the revolution - it made significant steps to becoming a real working class alternative. In the first local elections, 10,000 people voted for the LA in Prague. But by then the revolution had been usurped by careerist dissident intellectuals and former Communist bureaucrats. They took over a movement of Citizens' Forums and the state apparatus, and by





means of a massive propaganda campaign succeeded in persuading people that we could not have socialism with democracy - that the only way was the western 'market economy' idea.

This new situation saw the LA once more in a position of isolated discussion circles. This time it was fatal. Some of its leading figures were moving towards a pro-market position, sectarianism occurred and in the end its internal conflicts destroyed it.

**Tell us a little about your formation. Is Solidarita a completely new organization or did you develop from another organization?**

**ORAS:** *Solidarita* developed from the *Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation (ASF)*, whose roots reach to the LA. After 1990, in a time of the greatest illusions about the market economy and consequently the greatest isolation of the left (no matter whether pro-market or socialist), the *ASF* sank into a deep sectarianism and dogmatism - which it

as well as national struggles of workers and young people, and through discussions, we are accumulating experience and clarifying our ideas. We describe ourselves either as anarcho-syndicalists or libertarian socialists.

**How has 'platformism' influenced Solidarita-ORA and informed your group's activity?**

**ORAS:** In the second half of the 1990s we accepted the platformist tradition of anarcho-communism as the best one offered by anarchism: for both its emphasis on class struggle and pro-organizational direction, as well as for its orientation towards the working class rather than the activists' ghetto.

However, the self-reflection of our functioning has reminded us that our group lacks deeper, critical discussions which would allow us to look for the most coherent theory/praxis; this self-reflection has influenced further functioning of *ORAS*.

The discussions, which we have tried to develop since then, concern the fundamen-

pay off. However, we also think that becoming "revolutionary" academics would not be the right path to take.

The Platform indeed was not the Bible for us, it meant the beginning and not the end of revolutionary theory (also, we take into account that it is concerned with building mass organization in revolutionary times). We started to search also for another sources of inspiration: we have returned to Marx and have absorbed influences of left communism, Situationism, council communism and autonomist Marxism. We understand them not as some petrified sets of doctrine, one of which we could accept separately or mix them all mechanically, but we regard them as the historical expressions of proletarian movement to which we can relate. And we think that this process has to be continuous. That means that while some of us are inclined rather towards the "pure platformism" and others would rather call themselves simply "communists". We refuse to blindly adhere to any ideology. On this level we strive for the theoretical reflection of a real movement of the proletariat.

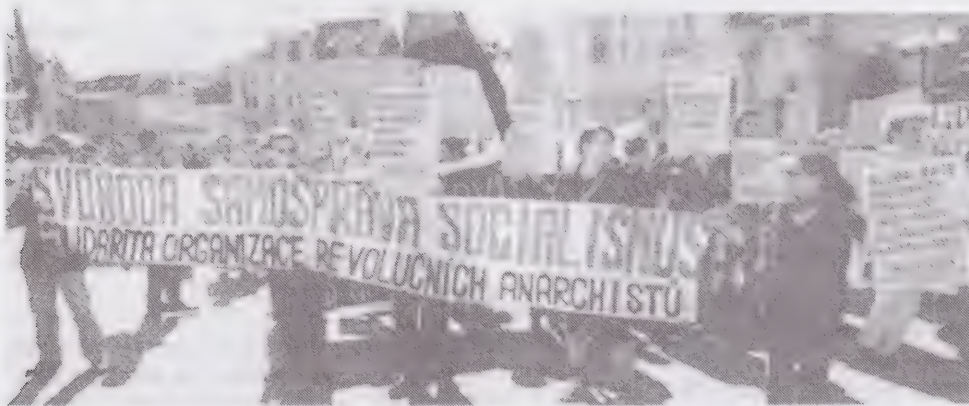
**What is the relationship between Solidarita and other anarchist groups active in the Czech Republic and Slovakia? Is there much collaboration? Are there any formal anarchist networks between the various former Eastern Bloc countries?**

**ORAS:** Our relationship with other anarchist groups seems to be relatively good. On some actions we co-operate with the *Czechoslovak Anarchist Federation (CSAF)*, *March 8th Feminist Group (FS8B)*, *Anti-Fascist Action (AFA)*, *Federation of Social Anarchists (FSA)*, and *Reclaim the Streets! (ULI)*. Also, to various extents, some of our members and supporters collaborate with *AFA*, and we distribute some of materials of all these groups.

As for the formal anarchist networks between Eastern European countries, there does not seem to be any. Rather it is more of an informal, though organized, exchange of information through mailing lists (alter-EE mailing list, for instance) and occasional visits. Also an international anarchist magazine 'Abolishing Borders From Below' should be meant as a tool for an exchange of information.

**What is Solidarita's position relative to the unions? Do you favor the formation of new syndicalist unions?**

**ORAS:** Despite all the problems with the present unions, we believe in working inside them. We believe they are real working class



**Anti-capitalist protests against IMF and World Bank, Prague 2000**

has not recovered from yet.

But after this interval, there was a change: The first union struggles occurred; students fought back against the introduction of fees for education at universities; there was more and more support among people for environmentalist campaigns; in general the discontent of the working population was growing. A minority in the *ASF* did its best to be involved in this ferment and tried to translate its experience from those struggles into an internal debate in the *ASF*. That debate should have changed the *ASF* into an active and effective libertarian organization. However, the majority in the *ASF* refused to discuss our proposals and we had to leave. Since that time (1996), *Solidarita* has been working to build itself. Our theoretical and organizational development is not finished yet. Through continuous involvement in local

tal questions such as "What is Capital?", "What precisely is the fundamental contradiction of capitalism?", "Are unions possible weapons of the working class for communization of society?", "What are the possibilities and limits of revolutionary minority in non-revolutionary times?", "How can we involve ourselves in day-to-day class struggles and still keep our revolutionary attitudes?". These are practical questions for us, which we - as proletarians within the (libertarian) communist tendency - ask ourselves and which spring from certain experiences of ours - experiences that we gain from the class struggles and workplaces and from the "activist" involvement with the anarchist movement. We believe that not burdening ourselves with difficult critical debate for the benefit of "political realism" and "action in the here and now" does not



organizations. Within them we argue for a syndicalist alternative of combative and democratic unions run 'by workers for workers', where all delegates would be immediately recallable so that workers would control their own struggles. Unions should be active not only in a workplace, but also in communities. They should take part in struggle against racism and fascism, in environmental campaigns. Their final goal should be transformation of this society of market dictatorship into a libertarian socialist society of social justice, workers' self-management and grassroots democracy.

That kind of union can come into existence only through our active participation in present day unions and through a rank and file movement in these unions for control over their organizations and fights.

***How is Solidarita involved in workplace struggles? I have read reports about the 'Workers Actions Groups' you have formed in various factories. What is the strategy behind these groups? How effective have they been in advancing militancy and self-organization among workers?***

**ORAS:** Now we are involved in workplace struggles mainly as individuals, who work on a particular job. Thus some of our members practice absenteeism, sabotage, slow work, or occasionally participate in some collective attempts at resistance (for example, an attempt of cleaning workers to fight for shorter hours and higher pay). As *ORAS* we have occasionally tried to intervene in factories, where mass layoffs have occurred.

Examples of an older forms of this kind of intervention are "Workers Action Groups" (WAG). Actually, we took this idea from striking Czech miners from the Koh-i-noor mine, who spontaneously developed a practice where the most radical workers acted as an informal group, which in some kind started and/or prolonged the struggle. As this was in the time of relatively widespread industrial unrest, in which unions proved to play fully on the side of the capitalists, we tried to voice this particular miner's tactic (independent of unions, and to some extent even an anti-unionist position) to other workers, who felt that under the leadership of unions they were losing.

In two cases we were to some extent successful, because a kind of WAGs was established and they tried to put up resistance. In the Zetor tractor factory three workers of the 8-member WAG handed out leaflets calling for a general workers assembly to be held at a particular hour. This assembly in front of company headquarters was attended by

about 1,000 of their workmates. However, as this idea of the resistance outside and against unions had not organically originated from their previous struggle (as in the case of miners), but had come as a mediated experience from an outside group, they were not able to develop this situation any further. WAG was intimidated by joint efforts of unions and management, and gathered workers were not prepared to do anything themselves. An important factor in this definitely also was that workers themselves sensed that under objective conditions than they have no chance of accomplishing any significant victory. Even the miners were able only to put off the closure of their pit. To some extent (and with the same outcome) WAGs also contributed in the case of Zetor, and an aircraft factory LET Kunovice, where workers self-organization finished after a spontaneous demo.

From these experiences we concluded that although under some conditions a revolutionary group can inspire workers self-organization, it cannot move the particular struggle of workers any further if the workers do not do this themselves, on the basis of their own experience and perception of their own conditions. Thus in a next case of mass layoffs (Flextronics Brno moving its operations to China), we just made a leaflet describing individual forms of a passive resistance against layoffs, explaining them as a latent form of class struggle. We knew that workers themselves realistically do not believe in a possibility to prevent the relocation of the plant and do not even strive for preserving those shit-jobs. That is why we just tried to contribute to their self-awareness and express our own conclusions derived from their experience with multinational capital.

***What is some of the current activity of Solidarita? Future plans?***

**ORAS:** We have been able to launch discussions and reading groups (most recently around Dauvé's 'Eclipse and Re-Emergence of Communist Movement') with relative success. These have aroused the interest of new people, who take part in them along with us and that is positive.

One of our most important contemporary projects is 'Alarm: The Internet Magazine of Libertarian Communism'. As we note in the mission statement, its aim "is not to make a counterweight to official newspapers: we just want to express our everyday experience of life in the capitalist society, its reflections and the anarchist-communist tendency, which is an expression of this experience: tendency, which rejects present private capitalism in the same way as state

capitalism, which ruled the Eastern bloc before 1989, as arbitrary forms taken by the dictatorship of capital." 'Alarm' contains news from class struggles all over the world and from struggles of the anarchist movement and other anti-capitalist minorities, as well as important contributions to the development of revolutionary theory. Besides this we irregularly publish a paper called 'Solidarity' aimed primarily at proletarians, and some pamphlets.

Our Prague collective is also involved with running an info-café called "Mole's Column", which costs us a lot of energy, time and money. In this way we would like to express our gratitude to all foreign comrades, who have sent contributions for this project, as well as to those who send their press materials to reading room/library, which will be the part of the info-café (Troploin, Loren Goldner, *Alternative Libertaire*, WSM, NEFAC, ICG, Internationalist Perspectives, etc.). And again I have to mention our comrades, who work with AFA and try to develop an communist critique of anti-fascism and search for communist ways of struggle against fascism.

Recently we were involved in a campaign and protests against NATO summit, which took place in Prague in November 2002. As *ORAS*, we have not been involved with the organizers' collective for the whole time, but in accordance with our capacities we helped out with some specific activities. In the Moravian region we made a speaking tour explaining our position towards NATO, refusing capitalist wars and peace and arguing for "No War But The Class War" and in the same spirit we co-organized a smaller anti-NATO gathering in Brno. We also participated in the protests themselves, in the Medical Group and in the self-organization of demonstrators against police provocateurs and capitalist media. We were also bringing topical news from the streets in 'Alarm'.

As for the future plans, we are determined to further develop revolutionary theory and search for new modes of intervention in class struggles, although we have no illusions that this will be anything other than a very challenging process.

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# Bikisha Media Collective



*South Africa is a country where platformist influence has had a huge impact on the burgeoning anarchist movement. The Bikisha Media Collective is a young platformist organization that formed out of the remnants of the Workers Solidarity Federation, which dissolved in 1999. They have a very active presence in numerous social movements and popular struggles, and continue to provide an inspiring example of what can be accomplished when anarchists get organized. Those of us from NEFAC have always maintained good relations with comrades from the BMC, and we are very pleased to be able to include them in this series. Below is an interview with Michael Schmidt, who is the group's international secretary.*

**- interview by MaRK, Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)**

**Could you start by giving a general history of class struggle anarchism in South Africa?**

**BMC:** The first known anarchist activity in southern Africa occurred in the 1870s when the black flag flew over the Kimberley diamond diggings during an industrial dispute. It is thought that several exiled Communards participated in this uprising. Between 1896 and 1905, anarchist militants deported from Portugal spent time in jails in Mozambique. It was there, in the early days of the 20th Century, that the anarchist printer Jose Estevam, having been released from prison, established the first known anarchist organization in the region, the *Revolutionary*

*League (RL)* of Lourenco-Marques, a city which today is the capital Maputo.

Anarchism emerged in late nineteenth-century South Africa, notably through the pioneer work of Henry Glasse. It was only in the early 1900s that the movement began to assume a more organized form.

The *Social Democratic Federation*, founded in Cape Town, included anarchists as well as other leftists, ranging from radicals to reformists (the founder of the *SDF*, Wilfrid Harrison, described himself as a philosophical anarchist). 'The Voice of Labour', a weekly radical labor paper, started in 1908 or so and began to cover anarcho-syndicalist and anarchist ideas with increasing frequency, and in 1910 two specifically *IWW*-style organizations emerged: the *IWW* and the *Socialist Labour Party*, each of which identified with a different faction in the *IWW* split in the US and elsewhere over "political action." Needless to say, they were quite hostile to one another!

In 1915, a far more significant development took place: the founding of the *International Socialist League (ISL)*, which brought together the veterans of the by-then defunct *IWW* and *SLP* as well as a radical anti-war group that had emerged within, and had left, the rightwing *South African Labour Party*. The *ISL* soon adopted an *IWW* approach; never calling themselves anarchists, they were committed to a revolutionary industrial unionism that would unite South African workers across race, ethnicity and skill.

At the time, South Africa's workforce was divided racially, with most skilled jobs being the preserve of whites, unskilled labor undertaken by blacks (under indenture contracts and strict controls over movement and residence), with Indians, coloreds ("mixed-race", a large group) and poor whites falling somewhere in the middle.

The *ISL* tried (without much success, although *ISL* militants became leading radical unionists in Witwatersrand unions), to reform white craft unions in an *IWW* direction, whilst also beginning attempts at unionizing other workers: in 1917 the *ISL* helped found the *Industrial Workers of Africa (IWA)*, originally called the *IWW* but changed after a month or so) in Johannesburg, this being the first trade union for black workers in South

African history and probably the first in British colonial Africa; that same year it also founded the *Indian Workers Industrial Union* in Durban; in 1919 it founded two unions in Kimberly, mainly based amongst the predominantly colored workforce there, these being the *Clothing Workers Industrial Union*, which also emerged in other centers, and the *Horse Drivers Union*.

Another *IWW* aligned group, the *Industrial Socialist League (IndSL)*, which took a strictly anti-electoral line (the *ISL* saw elections as a platform for propaganda), emerged independently in Cape Town in 1918 as a split from what its founders saw as a passive, propaganda-only *SDF*. They launched a monthly paper entitled, ironically, *The Bolshevik* (a term that at that time was synonymous with "insurrectionist"). The *IndSL* also formed a union, mainly amongst colored factory workers, called the *Sweet and Jam Workers Industrial Union*. Like their counterparts in the *ISL*, *IndSL* members became very prominent in the Cape mainstream union federation, but with little effect in terms of winning the organizations as a whole to anarcho-syndicalism.

The formation of unions amongst blacks, coloreds and Indians from 1917 onwards marked an important step forward for the South African anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists. The *IWW* and *SLP* had, before World War I, actively opposed racial prejudice amongst white workers, and preached interracial unionism, but remained entirely, it seems, based amongst whites.

The main body of *ISL* and *IndSL* members were also whites, mainly working class as well, with a large number of East European Jews as well as Scots, and Irish represented. However, with the unions formed from 1917, the overall racial composition of the anarcho-syndicalist "movement" (as opposed to specific groups like the *ISL* and *IndSL*) changed radically.

The leading black, colored and Indian workers in these unions adopted anarcho-syndicalist ideas, and either joined the *ISL*, or took these ideas with them into the *African National Congress*, which on the Witwatersrand had, by 1918, a significant anarcho-syndicalist presence in its leader-



ship, whose views were made felt in the 1918-19 period in particular. For the *ISL*, the *IndSL* and the militants in the unions associated with these organizations, revolutionary industrial unions were seen as serving several complementary functions: uniting workers across race and combating prejudice; providing the basis for mass campaigns against racial laws; and laying the basis for a "general lockout of the capitalist class" and worker self-management.

In 1921, the *ISL*, *SDF* and *IndSL* all played a leading role in founding the *Communist Party of SA*. This marked the death knell of the "first wave" of anarchist organizing in South Africa. Although some key figures in the *CPSA* continued to hold syndicalist and anti-racist views, such as Percy Fisher. The huge purges that took place in the Party in the 1930s, the weight of Stalinist ideas, boosted by the immense prestige of the USSR, and the rise of Trotskyism and Black Nationalism all contributed to the decline of libertarian currents. *CPSA* expellees with a libertarian background tended to become Trots (e.g. Frank Glass from the Cape) or move into nationalism (e.g. Johnny Gomas from Kimberely).

It is notable that many of the black, colored and Indian militants in the *ISL* and *IndSL*-linked unions, joined the *CPSA*. The *IWA* became absorbed into a new black general union, the *ICU*, founded in 1921 (a successor to an organization of the same name founded in Cape Town in 1919 which had variously co-operated and competed with the *IWA* section there on the Cape Town docks).

The *ICU* did adopt a version of the *IWW* preamble, and the rhetoric of the general strike, but cannot be considered more than quasi-syndicalist: the revolutionary general strike jostled with nationalist millenarianism, Garveyism and traditional ideologies in an unstable (and terribly organized) union melange that survived until the 1940s, but was effectively dead by the late 1920s.

Following the collapse of the *ICU*, anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism maintained only a twilight existence in the shadow of Stalinism and Black Nationalism. During the Spanish Revolution of 1936-1939, several South Africans fought on the side of the republic against the fascists, as part of the 40,000 volunteers from 53 nations who defended the republic, but it is not known if any of them were specifically anarchist. Research will be done into this aspect.

Although some anarchist materials were available in South Africa in later years - for instance, through the radical Vanguard Books in Johannesburg - and although some anarchist materials were banned after 1950

(in terms of the sweeping "Suppression of Communism Act," which also banned the *CPSA*), it was only in the 1980s that the beginnings of a new wave, a "second wave" of organized anarchist activism began.

Following the adoption of the armed struggle in South Africa in 1961 by the *ANC*'s armed wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK)*, several libertarians joined in the fight. At least one anarchist, Thomas Meyer, a white teacher of black students in the far north of the country, is known to have joined *MK* as an anarchist and was involved in smuggling materials into South Africa from neighboring Botswana.

There was a revival of interest in anarchism among student groups in 1968 as a result of the French Revolt of that year which saw students provoke a national crisis that saw 10-million workers go out on strike, many towns become self-managing and the near-collapse of General Charles de Gaulle's regime. At the then whites-only University of the Witwatersrand, for instance, three students ran on an anarchist ticket for the Students' Representative Council in 1968 and one was elected, but their understanding of anarchism tended to be chaotic and was overshadowed by the Trotskyists and other authoritarian Communist groups.

From the 1973 Durban strikes onwards, the black trade union movement, which had been moribund since the late 1920s (excluding the 1946 miner's strike) was revived and syndicalist elements again developed. Leading revolutionary syndicalists at this time included Rick Turner, who was assassinated in 1978, apparently by an apartheid death squad.

By the time the *Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)* was founded in 1985, syndicalism, usually termed the "workerist" tendency, was very powerful. Vigorous debates took place within *COSATU* between the syndicalists and the *SACP*-aligned "populists" who wanted it to ally with the cross-class nationalist *ANC*. Although the populists won the argument, syndicalism remained strong within *COSATU* at the time.

In the 1980s, white, and to a lesser extent, Indian youth involved in the punk subculture played a role in the revival of anarchism, whilst there were also individual black anarchists in a number of townships. 'Zines were the main form of anarchist writing at this stage, and analyses of the South African situation were rather weak, with 'zines reflecting the punk subculture for the most part. The "movement" at this stage had no organizational form, no platforms and no noticeable effect on the big struggles of the period, but did form part of the anti-militarist, anti-racist culture of resistance.

In 1992, two years before apartheid came to an end, but while neo-fascism, state-sponsored death-squad activity, military conscription and murderous large-scale battles between the nationalist "liberation movements" like the *ANC* were common, an organized group, called the *Anarchist Revolutionary Movement (ARM)* was formed. But it was not very coherent and so not very effective. A large section of the organization remained within the counter-cultural ghetto; however, an *ARM* section at the University of the Witwatersrand campus - which included people associated with the 'Revolt' 'zine, produced in 1992 - consciously focused on work in the student movement and had some success in recruiting an integrated membership, and developing an analysis of South African capitalism that sought to link the struggle against apartheid to the struggle against capitalism, arguing for a workers democracy rather than a bourgeois post-colonial regime. It produced a once-off magazine 'Unrest'.

In retrospect the student section of *ARM* was somewhat too dogmatic and extremist. In 1995, following the 1994 all-race general election that brought the *ANC* to power, the *ARM* became the *Workers Solidarity Federation (WSF)*, which grew by 1999 to around 40 members, around 80% of them black and working class. The *WSF* was influenced deeply by the platformism of the *Workers Solidarity Movement* in Ireland, and developed a rigorous set of position papers and materials, which we carry online today under our "pamphlets" section of the *Zabalaza* website. The theoretical work of the *WSF* marked an enormous step forward for South African anarchism and continues to provide the basic framework of ideas for current organized South African anarchists. The *WSF* was originally based in Johannesburg but soon linked up with anarchists in Durban and Cape Town, becoming the first national anarchist organization since the 1910s. The *WSF* produced the journal 'Workers' Solidarity', which incorporated *Unrest*. It came out twice a year.

In the early 1990s, the *Durban Anarchist Federation (DAF)* was formed, consisting of three groups: a propaganda collective, a green collective and a "riot grrl" collective. The propaganda collective was initially known as the *Awareness League*, then later *Land & Freedom* and throughout the 1990s, it published the journal 'Freedom' which was in English with some articles in Zulu. *Land & Freedom* continues today as *Zabalaza Books (ZB)*. The *DAF* initially worked alongside the *WSF*, but declined an invitation to join it, being far more affinity-based, but a



Durban section of the *WSF* was established. The *DAF* transformed into the *Anarchist Workers' Group (AWG)* in the late 1990s but the *AWG* collapsed several months later because of internal political and personal differences. I would personally say it's collapse came about because it repudiated platformism, relying on weak friendship-based affinity group organizing. In practice, what happened was that when members had a falling out, the *AWG* fell apart because their political "cement" was not strong enough.

The *WSF* was involved in workers' marches, student occupations, and propaganda work; it even flirted with the notion of forming a union at one stage! However, it saw itself as a specific political group, and not a union, such as the *IWW* or *CNT*. *WSF* saw itself more as an *FAI*, and in general aimed to work within existing unions, rather than form new red unions. It also maintained extensive international links, including with anarchists in other African countries, but until the recent signing up with the *International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS)* we had no contact with Latin American groups, mainly due to language barriers. Thanks to our involvement with the *ILS*, this is now changing and we see it as important because conditions for organizations like the *FAG* in Brazil are far more similar to those in South Africa than those of European or North American organizations.

In August 1998, following a talk given in Lusaka, Zambia, by myself to an audience of about 40 members of the Marxist-Leninist Socialist Caucus and the University of Zambia - Cuba Friendship Association, the *Anarchist & Workers' Solidarity Movement (AWSM)* was established by self-taught anarchist Wilstar Choongo. It was the first known anarchist group in Central Africa since the hey-day of the anarcho-syndicalist influenced *Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU)* which peaked at 100,000 members in 1927 with a section in Zambia. The *AWSM* consisted of both worker and student members. Close relations were maintained between the *AWSM* and the *WSF*, but the former appears to have collapsed in mid-1999 following Choongo's death by malaria.

In 1999, the *WSF* was dissolved for a range of reasons, the foremost of which were: weak internal education, leading to a degree of organizational ineffectiveness; the view that it was premature to launch a specific anarchist political organization, as our small numbers trapped us in the classic ghetto of the far left (an organization that starts small remains small because it is too small to attract serious attention as an alternative for workers; a

Catch-22 situation); and the fact that objective conditions had yet to change within the working class. Over the past two years, those objective conditions have now changed, with the class now starting to mobilize against the neo-liberal regime of the *ANC*.

**How did the *Bikisha Media Collective* first form?**

**BMC:** The ex-*WSF* militants chose to focus on building anarchists rather than building an organization. In other words, the strategic focus shifted from trying to win people to an organization, and instead to the broadest possible diffusion of relevant anarchist materials and literature to the widest layer of workers, with an emphasis on the black unemployed youth. The groundwork for future anarchist action could be laid in this way. In 1999, two projects (not organizations) were prioritized: *Bikisha Media Collective*, founded in 1999, and *Zabalaza Books*, which was already established in Durban - which worked closely together to produce and distribute a wide range of pamphlets and materials, and, more recently, a journal called 'Zabalaza' (issue #4 of which is currently in production).

Militants were expected to be involved in the class struggle: for instance, *Bikisha* affiliated to the *Anti-Privatization Forum (APF)* in Johannesburg, and the *Zabalaza Action Group* to the *Concerned Citizens' Forum (CCF)* in Durban. The main objective of the projects is to provide theoretical and practical support for the emergent social movements.

**How would you say 'platformism' has influenced your activity?**

**BMC:** Platformism has proven to be a vital instrument in welding together an organization of hardcore class-war anarchists over the past decade. It has given us the organizational and intellectual tools necessary to take on the tasks we have and to stay the distance. During the *WSF* days it enabled us to analyze the South African transition in a non-sentimental light and to focus on practical activism.

Since the founding of the *BMC*, with the *Workers' Library & Museum*, we managed to carve out an independent anti-governmental space in very hostile circumstances (*ANC* and *SACP* opposition, financial bankruptcy and corruption). This not only helped establish us as serious, hard-working, practical and constructive activists that communists and others were forced to take seriously despite our small size, but located us at the heart of the new social movements when they developed later. I believe platformism

was vital to ensuring we kept cool, focused and self-disciplined enough to weather the storms and reach the point we are at now: ready to form a regional anarchist federation based among the black poor, at the barricades of the social movements.

**You define yourselves foremost as a propaganda group. Are there any plans to eventually link up with other South African anarchist groups and developing into a more formal anarchist federation?**

**BMC:** We have all been linked from the outset into a regional anarchist network and co-operate on a number of different projects. Many projects have cross-membership. Briefly, the main elements of the regional network are:

(1) *Bikisha Media Collective* (Cape Town & Johannesburg propagandists & activists: ran the *Workers' Library & Museum* in Johannesburg, produces new works on anarchism applied to local conditions; fights against housing evictions, water & electricity cut-offs; some involvement in workers' radio)

(2) *Zabalaza Books* (Johannesburg publishers and producers of anarchist pamphlets, flyers, books & T-shirts, publishes *Freedom*, runs the *zabalaza.net* website)

(3) *Zabalaza Action Group* (Umlazi, Durban township militants: built the anarcho-syndicalist *Workers' Council*; runs workshops at the *Workers' College*, fights evictions & cut-offs)

(4) *Workers' Council* (Durban rank & file network of 60 workers belonging to different trade unions)

(5) *Forest City Collective* (Johannesburg urban ecology group involved in anti-militarism and self-defense)

(6) *Shesha Action Group* (Soweto township study group and community food garden)

(7) *People's Library* (Soweto township tool- and book-lending library, study group and community food garden)

(8) *Anarchist Black Cross* (regional class war prisoner & refugee/immigrant support, runs the non-sectarian *Anti-Repression Network* and publishes *Black Alert*)

(9) *Red & Black Forum* (Johannesburg quarterly anarchist discussion group for people interested in anarchist perspectives on social issues)

In addition, there is the *Smithfield Study Group* (rural group based in the Free State, fighting farm evictions and neo-Nazi farmers. Their emphasis on fascism rather than the capitalist state as the primary enemy makes them the sole local group with a substantial difference to us). There are also individual anarchists in centers like *Khayelitsha* (Cape



Town township), Pretoria and the Johannesburg inner city that we connect with.

Our regional membership including all groups, for your interest, is about 122 black, 13 white, 1 Indian, 1 colored, of which a minority of about a quarter are women, a distinct weakness at this stage, which we believe will change as we get more involved in the social movements. The "racial" spread pretty much reflects the national population. Most are unemployed urban black youth, but one of our oldest active members is a 42-year-old Class of '76 township militant.

Experience, clarity of anarchist theory/practice and enthusiasm varies, but we have some really tireless fire-brands who will literally walk for four hours to reach a meeting! Members are mostly working class and come from a variety of political backgrounds, including the SACP, Trotskyist tendencies, PAC, ANC and even the IFP. We have Christian, Muslim and atheist members. We have no armed wing, but our collective military experience is notable: we have members who during apartheid were army conscripts and others who were township militiamen.

On December 16, 2002, at Soweto, the BMC, the Zabalaza Action Group (ZAG), Zabalaza Books (ZB) and the Anarchist Black Cross (ABC-SA) proposed at a meeting with the Shesha Action Group (SAG) and the People's Library (PL) the founding of a regional anarchist federation to be named the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation (ZACF). The name reflects the powerful attraction of egalitarian communism in South Africa. The ZACF was proposed because of the rapid expansion of the anarchist movement in South Africa, in the townships of Gauteng, Durban and Cape Town in particular (the movement tripled over the past year); the need to co-ordinate between these groups in order to effectively engage with the dynamic new social movements in both urban and rural areas; the need to unite the southern African anarchist movement, based on clear (anti-)political, tactical and strategic lines in order to provide a home to genuine grassroots revolutionaries; and the need for an effective anarchist strategy for combating capitalist exploitation and state repression and to inject anti-authoritarian politics into the social movements.

We do not wish to merely build an organization for its own ends, but a) because history shows us that specific anarchist organizations are required to form an ideological/practical centre of gravity to weld militant grassroots forces into a libertarian weapon against the elites, even those within the social movements; b) that at times of

rapid growth, anarchist education and co-ordination is vital in order to present a solid challenge to Marxist-Leninists and other opportunists on the ground.

The proposal includes the following:

**PRINCIPLES:** That the ZACF be founded on revolutionary anarchist-communist principles. By anarchism we mean opposition to all forms of authority, be they social, political or economic and by communist we mean a mode of production and distribution based on the principle "from each according to ability, to each according to need". That the federation stands for direct democracy, functional equality, horizontal federalism, workers' self-management, and revolutionary anti-capitalism and anti-statism. That the ZACF base itself on the proud fighting tradition of more than 140 years of anarchist-communist history and on those anarchists like Thomas Thibedi, Bernard Sigamoney, Kapan Reuben and Talbot Williams who founded the revolutionary syndicalist unions in South Africa in 1917-1919. That the federation base itself on the 1927 'Organizational Platform of Libertarian Communists': federalism, tactical and theoretical unity, and collective action and responsibility.

**STRUCTURE:** That the ZACF be a horizontal federation of anarchist projects, groups and individuals, networked together in common revolutionary anarchist cause. That each group, project and individual retain its autonomy of action, so long as it is not deemed by a majority of the federation to be in contradiction of federation or anarchist principles. [I envisage that the functions of the various groups - publishing, prisoner support etc - will continue under the ZACF] That the federation decides at its annual congresses on joint projects and that it maintain constant contact with all members to ensure efficient co-ordination of all aims.

**MEMBERSHIP:** That membership of the ZACF be restricted to reliable, convinced anarchist revolutionaries who agree to abide by the federation's principles and who are active in the radical social movements. That membership be on an individual basis [by invitation only, I propose], but that a group that has all its members join be confirmed as

a member section of the federation.

**FUNCTIONS:** That the primary functions of the ZACF be to a) provide theoretical and practical support to revolutionary working class autonomous organization and to defend the class against political opportunists; b) provide theoretical and material support to the broader anarchist, autonomist and anti-authoritarian left movement in the region; c) maintain regular continental and international contacts with the global revolutionary anarchist movement.

**CONGRESSES:** That the ZACF should hold regional congresses once a year which will set the entire federation's tactics and strategy for the forthcoming year. That a majority of the federation can call an emergency regional congress within a month if needed. That sub-regional meetings be held in the main centers of activity four times a year or more frequently as required. That the founding congress establishes the rules of decision-making at congresses and meetings (including what is meant by terms like "majority"), so

long as they conform to anarchist and platformist principles. That decision-making be as far as possible by consensus. That congress can elect immediately-recallable commissions to cover federation projects such as printing its journal. That groups and projects convene their own meetings as frequently as they deem necessary to ensure efficient operations.

Anarchists and anarchist groups from across the country are currently being polled on the proposal with the intention to draw up a draft constitution for debate at the founding congress of the ZACF later this year, possibly around May Day.

**What are some of the main difficulties of class struggle organizing in post-apartheid South Africa?**

**BMC:** There are two sets of problems; practical and political. Practical problems include the extreme poverty of the people (75% of all homes don't have food security, hence the anarchist community food gardens). This means that our activists and those they work with are often hungry and too broke to pay for transport and telephones, which in turn makes networking and meeting difficult. Poverty also means that practical projects are delayed because of a lack of funds and





that *BMC* and *ZB* (which have employed members) have had to provide things such as building materials or tools. Another practical problem is the migrant labor system, combined with traditional duties which urban sons & daughters often have to perform at home in the rural areas. This means comrades sometimes simply disappear for months on end, not having been able to phone to alert us, only to reappear in some distant part of the country.

Political problems include the aggressive attitude of the ruling neo-liberal *ANC*, which is in government with the social-democratic *SACP* and Zulu chauvinist *IFP* towards the "ultra-left". This has involved over 500 arrests last year, many of them pre-emptive, police attacks on peaceful marches, assaults on comrades in jail by police, the threatened or actual deportation of foreign-born activists, demonization of the social movements in the mainstream media, and spying and harassment by National Intelligence Agency spooks. Another political problem is the demobilization and demoralization of civil society: the *ANC*-aligned *COSATU* has had its militants silenced by internal gagging orders and its militant unions rendered ineffective by gerry-mandering, that the mass-based alternative structures (people's militia, street committees, radical civics, rank & file worker networks) have largely been disbanded, often by the *ANC* which feared grassroots opposition. A third political problem is the "savior" status of the liberation movements, especially the *ANC* and particularly that of Nelson Mandela among poor South Africans, with capitalist media choirs singing their praises.

Fortunately the new social movements have grown out of and away from these authoritarian parties, usually around nuclei of hardened street activists. Fourthly, there is the usual game being played by the Trotskyists - the largest active political left faction - who are attempting to monopolize and command the new social movements, transforming them into a Workers' Party. Fortunately, there is much rank & file opposition to this opportunism. Finally, unlike Latin America, we have no elder anarchist movement to rely on for experience. All the other liberation movements in the region were and are authoritarian. It is difficult to spread the anarchist message in a country that has forgotten its anarchist past. The advantage of this is we are starting from scratch and do not have to deal with lunatic fringe terrorist or primitivist factions. More broadly speaking, South Africa's level of development by comparison to its neighbors puts it in a position where its social-political resistance is forced

to develop in a virtual vacuum, with similar movements in neighboring countries which have tiny industrial proletariats forced by necessity to also be tiny.

## What sort of international relations does the BMC maintain?

**BMC:** We have had intermittent contact with the *Awareness League (AL)* in Nigeria, whose book 'African Anarchism' we have kindly been allowed to reprint in a cheaper edition for southern Africa, and have recently made contact with comrades in the *Anti-Capitalist Convergence of Kenya (ACCK)*, a newly-formed joint anarchist and socialist network. But overall, anarchist contacts are few and far between in Africa and war, poor communications, poverty and migrant labor make maintaining contacts difficult. The *CNT-Vignoles* and the *IWA-AIT* cover most groups in Francophone countries such as Morocco and Burkina Faso. *Bikisha's* militants have involved themselves in at least one international event a year, believing practical internationalism to be vital to the successful creation of a coordinated global anarchist movement.

At home, we have participated in the mass protests against the bourgeois-capitalist events of the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in August 2001 and in the protests against the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in August 2002. We have maintained close links with, in particular, the *SAC* (Sweden), the *CNT-Vignoles* (France), the *Federation Anarchiste* (France/Belgium), the *WSM* (Ireland), the *CGT* (Spain) and *NEFAC* (USA/Canada). *Bikisha* and *Zabalaza Books* were both signatories to the international platformist/anarcho-communist statements issued at some of the anti-globalization actions in recent years and sent delegates to the "Other Future" international anarchist gathering in Paris, France, in April/May 2000, the anti-Eurotop anarchist congress in Gothenburg, Sweden, organized by the *SAC* in June 2001, and *ILS* meeting at Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2003. It was at the "Other Future" event in Paris that *Bikisha* took part in the international discussions that suggested the forming of a new network to link the large anarcho-syndicalist unions that fell outside the *IWA-AIT* and smaller anarchist political groups such as ourselves that fell outside the *IAF-IFA*. *Bikisha* and *Zabalaza Books* endorsed the founding of *International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS)* in Madrid, Spain, in May 2001, and today, both organizations, plus the *Zabalaza Action Group* based in Durban, are

members of the *ILS*. Our approach has always been deliberately non-sectarian towards all genuine anarchist formations, so we remain on friendly terms with, for instance, both the *IWA-AIT* and the expelled anarcho-syndicalist organizations now grouped under the *ILS*.

## What are your future plans for the group?

**BMC:** Specifically, in the African context, our objectives are to:

(1) Write new anarchist pamphlets that analyze the challenges facing the southern African working class, peasantry and poor and which provide anarchist solutions to these;

(2) Provide these theoretical materials to the emerging social movements, and in particular to fight against the attempts of the Marxist-Leninists in the Social Movements Indaba and the Landless People's Movement to transform these formations into a Workers' Party, that tried-and-failed authoritarian non-option;

(3) Provide practical support to the emerging social movements, by liberating those jailed, broadcasting information about social struggles, working in community gardens, providing material aid like building materials, participating in actions against the police and other thugs sub-contracted by the state;

(4) Network all Anglophone anarchist groups on the continent, help them with materials and enable them to contribute discussion pieces to our journal, with a view to not only producing new African anti-authoritarian practices, but practical intercontinental solidarity;

(5) Establish the *Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation (ZACF)* as the *ILS* representative in South Africa. The *ZACF* would probably also seek membership of the *International of Anarchist Federations (IAF)*;

(6) By doing all of the above, re-establish South Africa's recently-lost fighting tradition of grassroots militancy - township militia, street committees, autonomous civics, rank & file syndicalist networks, the very popular organizations that brought apartheid to its knees - in order to meet the challenges of the domestic and global neo-liberal regimes. From this strong, horizontally federated base, the South African poor would have the ability to launch a social revolution that would outflank our bourgeois communists and resonate across Africa and the world.

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# Federação Anarquista Gaúcha



*The Federação Anarquista Gaúcha has been around since 1995, and is named after the "gaúcho" region of southern Brazil, namely in the state of Rio Grande do Sul where this organization is from. The capital city, Porto Alegre, is well-known for its annual hosting of the World Social Forum (WSF). I was in Brazil at last year's WSF and got to meet a few FAG members, and in that short amount of time was very impressed with the organizational work and dedication of the group, who were simultaneously hosting the Jornadas Anarquistas Conference during the WSF, and continuing with their own work. Below is an interview with Luciana, the FAG's international secretary. Translation by Tony.*

**- interview by Red Sonja  
(NEFAC-Boston)**

**The FAG, in its formation, was influenced by the Uruguayan FAU, and is currently a part of the SIL (International Libertarian Solidarity). What anarchist groups do you work with closely in South America? Has the SIL been a beneficial international network for groups in the southern hemisphere? What kind of solidarity work is necessary from the anarchist groups in North America and Europe?**

**FAG:** The FAG maintains relations with various Brazilian and Latin American groups thru the internet and regular mail with newsletters and bulletins. In Latin America, we maintain relations more frequently with OSL from Argentina, CUAC from Chile, the Libertarian Youth from Bolivia, Indigenes Community Flores Magon de Oaxaca from Mexico, Quilombo Libertaria from Bolivia, and of course the FAU in Uruguay, with whom we have an organic relation.

In Brazil we have a direct relation with *Anarchist Federation Cabocla* from Belem do Para (north of Brazil - Amazonia), *Libertarian Struggle* from São Paulo, *Student Movement* from Mato Grosso do Sul, *Libertarian Construction Goiana* from Goiana, *Quilombo Cecilia* from Bahia and lots more. All the Brazilians here mentioned adhere to "specificismo."

To the FAG, the ILS was a big landmark to overcome sectarianism and begin building solidarity thru some basic principles shared by both "specificismo" and anarcho-syndicalism, or through other anarchists and revolutionaries that are part of ILS. The class solidarity, direct struggle and intervention in the social movements represents a big gap where the global dominant class tries to fragment the revolutionary will. We have received solidarity from organizations like SAC (Sweden), *Apoyo Mutuo* (Spain), the French section of ILS (*Alternative Libertaire*, *No Pasaran*, *OCL*), the OSL from Switzerland, and the FAU itself.

We think that the type of support that Latin American organizations need the most is good structure and political support in their campaigns for the liberation of political prisoners and other campaigns where we can count on international solidarity. Structurally, every organization in the peripheral countries has problems: it is a great effort to make a simple newsletter. Here in Brazil our big need is without a doubt a printing press.

**Does the FAG adhere to "specificismo" like the FAU in Uruguay? This seems to be a brand of platformism particular to the southern cone of South America. Could you elaborate on the differences and what influence each has in the principles of FAG?**

**FAG:** Today, "specificismo" is more a practice than a theory. FAU and FAG have tried very hard to build the definition of the same theory. Before they got to know platformism, the FAU started to elaborate on "specificismo." Not too long ago we got access to the text of Dielo Trouda, and the first translation was done to Brazilian Portuguese texts of Russian anarchists serves as a base, showing the need for anarchists to organize themselves. To act as anarchists inside the social movements, maintaining a distance of dis-

cussion and development of politics -- this Malatesta also talks about.

This section of the text is the most important to us. Today, the "specificismo" covers the following concepts: Structured anarchist organization in a federal manner, such as a delegation system and executive proceeding, functional so that it can be spread in a large geographic area without the need of assemblies and frequent meetings; practice and theory directed to this era and for a place where the organization is implemented; anarchist organization concentrated to the Principles of Declaration, Organic Charts and Strategies directed to the General Strategies. Exact strategies are the short term objectives of the organization, and the General Strategies are the long term objectives. Our action, in conjunction with the social movements, is balanced to the differences of political-ideological on a social level.

On the political-ideological level (political groups, including the FAG) should enhance the social and popular movements, but without trying to make it "anarchist", more militant. The social movement should not have a political ideology, the role should be to unite and not belong to a political party. In social movements it is possible to unite militants and build a unified base, which is not possible in an ideological level.

Because we know that we are not going to make the revolution by ourselves, we need be aware that we need to unite with other political forces without losing our identity. This identity is the anarchist organization, and is the avenue by which we want to build unity with other political forces in the social movement. The FAG has structures in the nucleuses in neighborhoods and cities where it acts, and those nucleuses contain autonomous tactics but not strategies. The strategy and the work plan are frequently reevaluated and readjusted within the analysis of the whole in our Federal Association, bringing together delegates from each nucleus.

**The FAG has developed some relationship with "rank and file" of the MST (Movimiento Sem Terra - Brazilian landless movement), a group which is truly a reflection of Brazil's particular political**



**climate. In what other ways is FAG trying to put forward an anarchist agenda and alternative given the particular situation of Brazil?**

**FAG:** We have contacts with MST but we are not members of MST. MST is without a doubt the biggest and the most combative popular movement from Brazil, although, it is a tool of organization for the farmers. FAG concentrates its activities in the urban zones of south Brazil. In the urban zones, the struggle to bring the workers together has not been accomplished, like the MST has done in the rural areas. The MST has tried to create alternatives for the struggles in the city but has not been able to accomplish this. We believe that with the big unemployment rate in Brazil, the oppressed urban class in large part is not concentrated in factories but rather in small towns, villages and slums. 70% of our people live with miserable jobs, what we call "bicos". They are construction workers, "camelôs" (street vendors), trash collectors, maids, security guards, repair workers, etc. Therefore leaving the majority of the population away from factories; they work nearby where they live and start families.

Therefore the FAG acts in their peripheral communities through what we call "espaços solidários" (solidarity territories), the Popular Resistance Committees. These territories have the mission to bring the people together to fight for their rights, work for the community, little by little, discussion and action will build an understanding of popular power and self esteem. We live in villages, slums and projects, and as residents we get other residents for the struggle, local gatherings, to educate mutually and go for a drink together.

From the simplest activities to the complicated ones, we build what we call "tecido social" that today it is worn out by the fragmentation of the oppressed class. The committees have the role of speaking and building relationships not only between the residents but also between the popular organizations in the region: Mothers' Clubs, Community Radios, Soccer Clubs, Cultural Groups, Neighborhood Associations, Unions, etc. This way we try to form a solidarity group between all the organizations in the community, increasing strength mutually in direction of the struggle.

We also act in Student Associations in Universities, with a group of students that work in social movements, and we also intervene in the *Independent Media*

*Center (IMC).* We do this in order to give them more popular character and to make them a truly popular movement. Also we support local radio stations, and we avoid just putting bunch of information over the internet because only 3% of the population has access. Beyond the work at the social level, there is also the work on the ideological level. The FAG holds frequent debates in our headquarters, and does graffiti, murals, and other public activities that express our anarchist ideology and our position against the government.



**How does a revolutionary anarchist organization relate to the social democratic power of the Workers Party (PT)? This will always be a contradiction anarchists face: we hope for a growing left movement, and a general shift left, yet we will simultaneously be in opposition to these forces which maintain liberal and/or authoritarian tenets. Does the FAG hope to be the "thorn in the side" of the PT which provokes them to move farther Left? Or does the FAG hope to siphon off the more radical support of the PT into anarchist ranks?**

**FAG:** The PT is a very fragmented party. In the social movements like the MST and MTD (*The Unemployment Movement*) there are valuable militants that belong to PT who are completely disappointed with the course that the party has taken. However, because they do not see an alternative yet, they still believe that the PT can change to the real left. There are also others who are disappointed and are gathering strength to build a new workers party with a more revolutionary character based on Marxist-Leninist and Trotskyism.

In our opinion, the PT is today the official left party of the country that needs to exist to legitimize a false and corrupt democracy, was helped by the Brazilian bourgeois to win the presidential elections. They are the only political party able to create a social pact that calms down the social conflicts, calming down the MST, shutting up the hungry and miserable without force (at least for the moment). We can observe this with our long experience of the PT in the capital of Rio Grande do Sul.

What the PT is able to do is to calm down the social conflicts with the phrase of "estamos todos governando" ("We are all governing") and planning social projects

that will quiet down those movements that are most combative. Misery and unemployment are still the same, with the disguise that we are all participating, everything will get better. One way the PT does this is to participate in bureaucratic channels of popular participation where the "hungry" population sits down to dispute a miserable 10% of the government budget. If the demand is approved by popular vote, it still has to be approved by the executive. In turn the executive alleges lack of funds and rejects the project, postponing the promise project for three years.

The popular movement from Porto Alegre and the State as a whole, today is the most lawful and controlled institution in the country. This is the meaning of the "conscious citizen" of the PT.

**Does the FAG maintain an open forum with other anarchists in Brazil, especially those who are detractors of platformist and "especifista" ideas? How can organized anarchists offer dialogue with those other anarchist tendencies, hopefully persuading them to our position, yet maintain an even course in our organizing work?**

**FAG:** We maintain a relationship with groups and organizations of "specifismo" which we call FAO (*Forum of Organized Anarchism*) that started in Belém do Pará in 2002. Before that, we had what we called *National Coordination of the Organized Anarchists* but due to the difficulty of travel and the number of meetings, was not able to sustain itself.

In fact, we have tried various ways of national organizing and have not found the best way. Our country is very big and the price to travel is not accessible. It is easier for us to go by regions, like us from Cone Sul, the people from Center West, East and North, but because there are not many of us "especifistas" that were able to maintain the work through the years, we feel the need to get together.

We also feel the need to have space to meet and educate people and let groups know our experiences in case they would like to form anarchist organizations. For this, the FAO formed which is a once a year event. We are going to do an FAO Assembly now during the WSF because it is easier for our "companheiros" from other states to come to Porto Alegre for free.

Another open space for educating which is open to the anarchist of all tendencies and also militants with other ideologies are the 'Jornadas Anarquistas', where we can expose our work. The opportunity to gather a large number of people from our country



to talk about FAG, "especifismo" and to create new organizations is rare. The Internet has its limitations, therefore making it hard for our "companheiros" to take advantage of our accomplishments and learn from our mistakes in the same manner that it is hard for us to take advantage of the experiences of other groups and organizations.

**What kind of contradictions has FAG faced in dealing with such issues as sexism and racism? Do we need to have a united class based revolutionary movement, or is there room for others to organize separately in class-based anarchism?**

**FAG:** Theoretically, we are building a new concept of social class. We believe that the struggle for social class still exists, but the concept that class is based only on economical level is not a true reality today, both in Latin America and the rest of the world.

We have been discussing and seen in practice that the oppressed class is composed of different factors, not only economic; social factors, ideologies, geographical, political, gender, ethnicity, these factors, or some of these factors combined, define who is the oppressed and who is the oppressor. In the social and political level, we believe that a discussion about gender and ethnicity is absolutely necessary but we must have a discussion and practice that does not isolate us within. This way, the different oppressions are identified, but they should communicate between themselves and not create more separation of the people that are already very much separated by capitalism. This destroys solidarity and cooperation. Men should discuss and act regarding the oppression of women. Whites, Indigenous peoples, Blacks and Asians should coordinate actions about ethnic discrimination.

**Is there any parallel to the Argentine model of assemblies that could take hold in Brazil in the event of an economic downturn? And what is FAG's opinion of anarchist involvement in the Argentine situation?**

**FAG:** It is very possible to have a crisis in Brazil like in Argentina; it is in our assessment for the new year. One of our comrades went to Argentina for a meeting of popular movements and was very impressed with what is being developed by the people.

The "solidarity spaces" that we try to do here, is being done there with intent of class independency (independency from political parties, governments and business people).

At this point they hate the politicians, including the ones from the left, that are always expelled from the assemblies, except the ones that work together with the people. Those who are not side by side or working daily at the picket lines and in the solidarity spaces are immediately expelled and ridiculed.

What the people are building in Argentina is an example for the other Latin American countries that are still sleeping like Brazil. We believe that this situation is an example for any anarchist organization to use to create a strategy for building a parallel power. In our opinion, what is missing in Argentina is a project of popular power, a strategy, so that a social transformation takes place. There is spontaneity by the people, but there is not (one or more) political groups that are able to fight or build a project to manage the country in every level, building dual power.

We do not have information of the actions



**Anarchists demonstrate during the 2003 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil**

of our Argentine compañeros in the popular movements from there, what we have is reports from the social movements only, but not from the anarchists in these movements. We would like to know more about the actions taken, like how the anarchist organization survives all the social demands, where they are integrated, if they are building 'popular power', how they work with the other leftist movements. We would like to have all this information because it would be educational for us as we most likely will go through similar situations in the near future and we are very much interested in work at the social level with the movements where our Argentine compañeros are integrated.

**It has been noted that the World Social Forum has become increasingly watered down with liberal politics. The WSF seems both a boon and a hinderance to**

**FAG as an organization in your home state of Rio Grande do Sul. How has the group continued to maintain a level of participation in the Forum? Will there be another Jornadas Anarquistas in 2003?**

**FAG:** Our criticism towards the WSF is still the same: it is a propaganda forum for the leftist governments, where they try to obtain political and structural support at the international level for their humanitarian projects of capitalism (national-development), by using the social movements as a front for the supposed "democracy and popular participation". FAG will not participate in any shape or form in the WSF this year.

We are organizing from the popular organizations where we are integrated, the Latin American Gathering of Autonomous Popular Organizations. That will take place during the WSF, but it is not part of the program or the structure of the WSF. It is a gathering of com-

bative organizations that are positioned against the dependency of the political parties, governments, and corporations and will discuss the different actions that we can build from our active locations. FAG will be present through committees of popular resistance, student groups, IMC and the Trash Collectors Movement, these are the social organizations where we are integrated and are organizing the Gathering. We have organized interventions in the World Social Forum Rally with are own

forces that will act in a distinguished manner, trying to express our criticism to WSF.

We will also have the second edition of the 'Jornadas Anarquistas' as propaganda of our ideas of organized anarchism and social integration. In this year's 'Jornadas' we will have the opening of workshops, and if groups are willing to offer workshops and talk about their experiences, they will have the opportunity for this.

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# Congreso de Unificación Anarco-Comunista

*Anarchism has had a tremendous resurgence in post-Pinochet Chile. One of the most active groups today is the Congreso de Unificación Anarco-Comunista (CUAC), a relatively young organization with strong platformist influence. The CUAC formed around the same time as NEFAC. Our respective organizations have shared a similar path of growth and development over the past three years, and comradely relations continues to exist between us. Below is an interview with Jose Antonio Gutierrez, the CUAC's internal secretary and Juan, the group's general secretary.*

**- interview by MaRK, Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)**

**Could you begin with a short history of anarchism in Chile?**

**CUAC:** Anarchism in Chile has a long tradition. By the early 1890s, there was a great number of workers' organizations being formed. In some cases the organizations held strong links with the former artisans movement, but in others there was a sharp opposition between the new class struggle organizations and the mutualist ideology of the artisans. It is in this context that the first anarchist articles and ideas start to appear, towards 1897, when in the workers press you could read articles of Kropotkin. That year, the *Socialist Union* was formed, and though it was not explicitly anarchist, it is here that the nucleus of anarchism starts to gather. In 1898 the first declared anarchist paper appears, called *El Rebelde*, and that year the anarchists start organizing new kinds of workers unions for the class struggle; they called them *Sociedades de Resistencia*.

So anarchism in Chile had a strictly working class origin, involved since its very beginning in the mass movement and the workers organizations, to such a point, that even the official history has to admit that the parents of the workers movement in Chile are the

anarchists, because it was their societies for resistance that evolved into the unions. Another important aspect of the anarchism here is that it was a local movement. In Argentina, for instance, the core of the movement on its early years were Italian and Spanish immigrants, but in Chile the immigration was little and had a small impact over the newborn socialist movement. It is true that anarchism arrived through Argentine influence but the militants here who got the message, were Chilean born.

By the turn of the century the societies for resistance were multiplying, among dock workers, coal miners, nitrate miners, carpenters, shoemakers, printers, and construction workers. By 1903, the first important strike of the century, of the dock workers in Valparaíso, was led by the anarchists and their organizations. Another important movement was to occur in 1905, that was a general protest and strike in Santiago, against the rising cost of living, and particularly on the cost of the meat; also this year, a first attempt to federate the revolutionary unions was made, and the *FTCh* (*Chilean Workers Federation*) was born, however it was short-lived because of the harsh repression. In 1906, in the north, another general strike erupted. All of these movements and all of the minor strikes as well, to constantly face the most brutal repression of the armed forces, and the number of dead are counted by hundreds.

But the worst of the crimes against the people in those years, and a hard beat against anarchism was the Santa Maria School slaughter. This took place in the north, in Iquique; December 21, 1907. The nitrate workers, led by known anarchists, went on a strike from their mines in the pampa (a grasslands region in South America), to the nearest city of Iquique, where they were all shot with artillery, leaving an uncertain number of dead workers, somewhere between 2000 and 3600. Their crime was to ask for better wages, and to be paid in cash, and not with *fichas* (a type of private currency, not legal tender) that were exchanged for products in the warehouses of the patron (boss).

After this, the anarchist movement had ups and downs, and by 1914 the *FORCh* was formed, that lasted for a short amount of time,

but set the foundations for the important Chilean section of the *IWW*, in 1919, that had around 20,000 members. Also, in those years the anarchist had formed the League of the Rent, that gather the people from poor neighborhoods (*conventillos*) demanding better housing, laying the foundations for the important community movements to come. As well, they were involved in founding the Students Federation, *FECh*, having an important presence by the end of that decade. Both the *FECh* and the *IWW*, as well as the whole anarchist movement were fiercely punished for their revolutionary courage in 1920, with new imprisonments, slaughter, raids and destruction of workers halls.

In Punta Arenas, the extreme south of our country, the *FOM*, of a strong anarchist influence was punished as well, the same year that in the Argentine Patagonia the *FORA* workers were massacred. But the movement was too strong to be beaten down just by repression. So they used a more subtle tactic: in 1925 the unions became legal, and the anarchists didn't know what to do, while the authoritarian communists entered the legalized unions and started getting the influence they were formerly denied by the resistance unions. For long the anarchist movement was handicapped by a dogmatic approach and was progressively losing influence.

Another important problem in the decline of Chilean anarchism, was the Ibañez coup in 1927: by then, all the revolutionary movement was pursued and smashed, and the anarchist movement was dismantled through a program of "union cleansing". Though unions were illegal before 1925, anarchists never had to face a long time of clandestinity: and political organizations can survive clandestinity, but that is much harder to unions. Despite this, some groups like "Siempre!" were active in clandestinity and some clandestine issues of the construction workers paper could appear. In 1931 Ibañez was overthrown through mass action, and the new *CGT* was formed to bring together what was left of the anarchist movement. The *IWW* continued to exist as well. Some loose propaganda groups were formed and an Anarchist Federation was established. But many leading anarchists, seeing the need of a revolutionary political organization besides the unions. They were



unable to solve this problem within anarchism, so they joined forces with some leftists and revolutionary Marxists to form the Chilean Socialist Party, that rejected bitterly both the Third International and the second one.

Since then, the anarchist movement kept losing influence, except for the shoemakers, beakers, some construction trades, brick makers, and printers, until the end of 1940s, when a new generation of anarcho-sindicalists started working directly in the legal unions, and thus broke their long isolation. This way, 1949 saw the first popular strike in so long with a strong anarchist influence. Then in 1950, the *Movement for the Unity of the Workers (MUNT)* was formed, an anarcho-sindicalist organization with this new approach. This was fundamental to form a single workers federation for 1953, that was called *CUT (Unique Workers Central)*, whose declaration of principles was partly redacted by anarchists, and which had some anarchists in the national secretary.

The break came in 1955, when a two day general strike put the anarchists and communists face to face: the president was about to give up his government, and the anarchists were demanding the *CUT* to take control of the economic situation; on the other hand, the communists said that it was necessary to establish dialogue with the authorities. In the end, the division lead the strike to nothing, and the anarchists left. By the end of the decade the *Libertarian Movement July 7th (ML7J)* was formed, and they started for the first time, giving a serious thought to anarchist organization. Then the *Movement of Revolutionary Force (MFR)* was formed in the early sixties to gather revolutionary tendencies, with a strong presence of the anarchists. Unable to organize before, and in a time of really big leftist parties, anarchism soon was forgotten, but not its practice, that was present in the beginning of the movement and survived through its life.

Thus, we can see a strong movement for popular power with a strong libertarian influence, during the Popular Unity government (1970-1973) some experiences were made from the rank and file, like Industrial Networks and Committees for Consumption, that were rudimentary forms of self-management, that were both the product of the spontaneous libertarian tendencies in the people, but were better understood also as the expression of a libertarian tradition and practices that survived the very anarchist movement.

***With the systematic suppression of leftwing movements during the era of Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1990), was the anarchist movement able to survive and directly influence the newer generations of militants, or***

***were anarchist ideas "rediscovered" once this period of reaction ended?***

**CUAC:** During the dictatorship, there was some anarchist activity, as well as some activity of anarchists in various movements and groups. However, this activity was very limited and obscured by the huge traditional parties of the left and by the fact that we couldn't be more than a bunch of comrades in a really massive movement. In the middle seventies, some anarchists took part in what was called the early *Resistencia*, around the *MRP (Movement of Popular Resistance)*, that was organized by the *MIR*, and it was in this wave of activity, that by the late seventies a resistance group with some anarchist influence was created. This was called *Brigadas Populares (Popular Brigades)*. This activity wasn't ideological, and we couldn't tell the presence of anarchists there if we didn't know the comrades that were actually involved there.

By the early 1980s, as the movement against the dictatorship started to push forward, the anarchist propaganda started to see the light again. We should remember the role that many of our old comrades played in this. Comrades long time gone, like Aliste. But we should like to mention a comrade that was crucial for the revival of the libertarian practices in our country: comrade Jose Ego Aguirre, whose recent death, on December 15th of the last year struck us all with a deep sorrow. This comrade alone used to stand outside schools, factories and universities, to give anarchist propaganda to the workers or students that were coming out. Thus, he formed an anarchist group of students in the early '80s to start printing out some propaganda and to help the struggle in the schools, a very active segment of society against the dictator. This group, of about seventeen students was founded in 1981 by the CNI, the political police, during a meeting and they were all imprisoned to be interrogated, by Guaton Romo, a famous hangman of Pinochet, in charge of the tortures. One of the students that was there, told us that, as the Pinochet regime declared a war against

"Marxism", they didn't know what to do when they started talking about anarchism, ecology and other things they haven't heard in their lives. So after a while they released them, after giving them a good battering, having used electricity on them, and having tortured viciously Ego Aguirre, then already an old man, in order they "learnt" they shouldn't get in trouble. But they didn't. So the anarchist propaganda kept on going and was specifically welcomed among the youth; many young anarchists started participating actively in the human rights movement, anti-militarist movement and in the movements against torture.

Also, in the communities (*poblaciones*), where the movement of resistance was strong, you find some anarchists in the *MIR* and even later in the *FPMR (Patriotic Front "Manuel Rodriguez"*, that started as the armed branch of the Chilean CP and then, in 1987,

split), involved in the struggle of resistance. Among university students, you find that the first anarchist collectives start to emerge: the group *Jose Domingo Gomez Rojas* (named after a Chilean anarchist student who died in 1920 in a madhouse as a product of three weeks of non-stop brutal torture) was formed in Universidad de Chile in 1983, the year that the massive national protest against the dictatorship started to occur.

The *RIA*, an anarchist group in the Catholic University, won the elections of the federation of students in 1984. Even

before, in 1980, when the student federation in the Universidad de Chile took its first steps to organize clandestinely, the paper of the students 'Despertar' (Awakening), reproduced articles on the anarchist students of the 20s, which shows a renewed interest in libertarian ideas. This serves to demonstrate that the growing of the anarchist movement then, in the nineties, has deep roots in the struggle against the dictatorship, and that the emergence of the first collectives can be traced to the development of a vast mass movement of direct action between 1983 and 1986.

The first anarchist paper to appear during dictatorship was 'HOMBRE Y SOCIEDAD', in





Santiago, 1985, that continued to be published until 1988, with the international help of Latin American anarchist exiles in France linked to the FA. It was useful to bring together the survivors of the old generation of anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists from the past decades, and it had really good analysis on the course of the struggles in Chile.

Unfortunately, the resources were scarce, the conditions to produce it difficult, and the number of issues limited so it had little impact outside the very anarchist movement. By 1988 other papers started to appear: in Concepcion, appeared *El Acrata*, linked to the TASYs, a social centre of great importance in that city, that brought together unions and community organizations; a year later, in 1989, in Santiago, started to appear 'Accion Directa', produced by people that participated in 'HOMBRE Y SOCIEDAD', plus a good number of young comrades that were getting close to the movement in the last time. So then you can see that the old movement was merging with the new one, of young people that was disappointed with the old political methods, and with the traditional parties and how they allied the so-called "transition to democracy" with the dictator.

What happened in the early 1990s was a virtual "boom" of anarchist ideas and practices, that make it seem like a rediscovery, but it is actually well linked to what happened in the 1980s. This "boom" was produced by an interest in new methods of organization by many young people, by new perspectives of how society should be after revolution (these two factors could be attributed to the previous anarchist propaganda) and by the very failures and mistakes of the leftist parties to bring about the so much promised changes in society, what many of their old social basis of support regarded as "treason". But also, there is something else that makes the movement seems to appear in the nineties from nowhere, and is the sharp contrast between the context in the eighties and nineties: previously the anarchist movement was immersed in a huge mass movement, when in the '90s, the mass movement was drastically reduced by the democratic mirage.

So the anarchist seemed to be more in the whole popular movement, in relative terms, even though their numbers could be

similar. Also, the anarchist represented an exception to the general "rule" of the moment: while all of the leftist parties were losing militants in numbers of thousands and entering a phase of crisis, anarchism was



**Anarchist Mayday march in Santiago, May 2000**

healthy and getting new militants everywhere. So that phenomenon also helps to give the impression that the movement appeared from nowhere in the nineties, and gives a certain credit to the "rediscovery" idea on Chilean anarchism. But the truth is that it was part of a whole and single process that started in the early '80s.

## ***When did the CUAC form? What was the political background of the founding members?***

**CUAC:** Though the CUAC was officially formed November 29, 1999, at the end of the First Chilean Anarcho-Communist Congress, the process that lead to its birth started a couple of years before. In the beginning of the 1990s, when the mirage of the new democratically elected government had vanished, a good lot of the youth came to anarchism disappointed by the traditional parties and their authoritarian structures, by the democracy that didn't really look like they promised years ago, but it seemed more like the right of the people to elect a new dictator every six years, and by the way everything remained the same, and most of the dictatorship institutions remained untouched.

Many in this new generation of anarchists came from some of the strongest parties in the left: communists, socialists (that used to be more radical than the CP, and didn't join the international social democracy until the early nineties), and from the MIR (Movement of Revolutionary Left). With the time, and with the deepening of the crisis of

the leftist parties in the early '90s, more and more young with no previous political militancy started to join the anarchist milieu. By the mid '90s, many started to think in a more serious manner about the issue of the organization, about the need to start organizing anarchists in such a way to make our activity in the popular ranks a fruitful one. By that time (1994), many attempts to organize anarchists were made, but all of them failed. The year 1997, for instance, there was held an anarchist conference in Santiago, organized by comrades from Temuco which tried to form the "National Anarchist Movement", but it resulted to be a complete disaster because of the inability of those who attended the conference to come to an agreement about the most basic issues. Since then we knew that it was impossible to bring all those claiming to be "anarchists", just because of that fact, into one organization. So we started to reflect about our failed organizational attempts and started to draw conclusions from our own experience.

Some groups were formed that tried to be an answer to that organizational problem we were facing; with time, by the beginning of 1999, people from these groups started talking and thinking about the possibility of coming together in one organization, that was more than merely "one-organization-plus-another", but which meant a decisive step forward in our very understanding of the anarchist movement until then, to start thinking of it as a mature political force to be immersed in the popular struggles and that saw itself as a real tool in the struggle of the exploited. For that it was necessary to lose fear to the supposed "corruption" inherent to organization; it was necessary to fight for building an organization able to have a concrete intervention in the mass movement.

The comrades from a group called *COMUNITANCIA* (made of a mixture of the words "communism" and "militancy") started making reflections about the need of a specific anarchist organization in the country that could think anarchism for our current reality. That was also an interest for the people of the paper *HOMBRE Y SOCIEDAD*, that was working about the basic ideas for the revolutionary organization, and also for comrades that were organized in their communities (poblaciones), in both Villa Francia and Pudahuel, two popular areas of Santiago, with a long leftist and revolutionary tradition. So as we were coming to agreements, we decided to merge into one organization; but for that purpose to be successful, we thought of not making the same mistakes from the past. We decided to organize a Congress (conference) to join



efforts and organizations. So we started preparing documents for discussion to be available some weeks before the Congress (about propaganda, unions, organization, immediate history of our movement, etc.), we published both the 'Manifesto of the Libertarian Communists' of Georges Fontenis and 'The Platform' of the Dielo Trouda group. As we knew it was impossible to organize the whole lot claiming to be anarchists, we decided to put some "conditions" to those to participate, as it was to involve more people than those in the organizing groups. Those conditions were: having the will to get organized, to understand anarchism as a product of class struggle, to have actual involvement in the popular movement, and to understand the need for social revolution (with all the implications of it). Also, the very name given to the Conference "Congreso Anarco-Comunista" was to serve as a filter. So the day of the Conference came, it lasted for two days (28th and 29th) and in the end, we had our brand new organization. Our analysis of our previous failures and our solutions to succeed this time proved to be successful.

About the political background of our militants, as we've said, a good number of them come from previous militancy in traditional parties of the Chilean left, like the *MIR*, the *Communist Party* and the *Socialist Party* of the eighties. Others, come from the new movement of the mid nineties and others come from actual work of the organization, like students or community work.

***How is the group organized? Are there active chapters in different cities?***

**CUAC:** The *CUAC* is organized under federative principles; however, it is only one single organization. The basis of our organization is the work in fronts, and currently we are active on the Students' Front and Poblaciones' Front; the Union Front is about to become active again. It is in the front where the militants have more of their organizational life, because this is where they develop and carry the actual policies of the organization. There they have the assemblies for the discussion of the general problems and resolutions and tasks for the *CUAC*. Every front has delegates that represent their discussion to the meeting of the Council (concejo), that is assisted by the delegates and the secretariat.

In the cities apart from Santiago, the only active branch is Valparaiso, a town near Santiago. But there are close links to some groups in Concepcion (*Asamblea de Convergencia Libertaria*), Chillan and Temuco

(*Movimiento Libertario Joaquin Murieta*) and we hope for the future to establish more formal links with those groups, in order to build a national libertarian front.

***The CUAC is an anarcho-communist group, with strong platformist influence. How did members of your organization first become interested in platformist ideas and methods of organization? What led to this theoretical development?***

**CUAC:** As we already mentioned, we evolved close to the platformist tradition because of our own experience, and the difficulties and failures we previously faced in giving an organizational shape to the movement. We started thinking of our need to get organized in a serious way and we arrived to very similar conclusions to those in the platform, without having any knowledge of its existence, for it was virtually unknown in the Spanish speaking movement. But hand in hand with our reflections on organization, that arose from our own experience and were surprisingly "platformist." Though we ignored this, we also understood fully the need to distance ourselves from those who weren't clear about the revolutionary tradition of anarchism: thus, we saw the need to understand anarchism as a class struggle revolutionary theory, that needs to be absolutely involved in the mass movement, and not to be isolated only among a bunch of "owners of the truth". This is important to mention, because all too often platformism is reduced to a "recipe" for organization, when, in reality, is more than that.

As Arshinov points out in his article "The old and new in anarchism", the organizational part is only ONE aspect of 'The Platform'. 'The Platform' is more than a document on organization: it is a summary of the most basic and general aspects of class struggle and revolutionary anarchism, and its organizational part is derived naturally from this understanding of anarchism. One cannot accept wholeheartedly its organizational method and reject bitterly its other aspects, because one explains the other.

So we arrived at "platformist" opinions through our own practice and without knowing the existence of such a document. So it wasn't really a surprise that we assumed it as soon as we had notice of it, and that the organization, as soon as it formed, familiarized itself to it and had a wide acceptance of platformism as our anarchist tradition. But it might be interesting how we got to know a text that was not

available in any Spanish translation and was absolutely unknown for us. It was only thanks to a mistake that we knew about it: comrades in 'HOMBRE Y SOCIEDAD' paper, ordered a pamphlet to England, the one was not available by the moment. So instead of the one we had ordered, we received the 'Manifesto of the Libertarian Communists' of Georges Fontenis, and we were really delighted to see that our reflections weren't so "original" and that there were other comrades who drew, from their own experience, conclusions similar to us. We translated this text immediately into Spanish, sent it to the printshop and started its distribution. And because of Fontenis' text, we got a notion that it was an anarchist tradition, and that there existed 'The Platform'.

Thanks to a comrade from the 'Black Flag' magazine (UK) and from the people of the *WSM*, we got a copy of 'The Platform', the one we translated as well into Spanish (presumably for the first time) and published in 'HOMBRE Y SOCIEDAD' paper. This is how we realized of the existence of the platformist tradition. Although in Spanish we almost never have used this expression; fortunately, there is a strong association in Chile by the libertarian movement of the word "anarcho-communist" with our methods and principles, that are platformist, so instead of platformist, it is said plainly anarcho-communists.

The platformist positions have been of a paramount importance in the movement, even beyond the very *CUAC*, and are started to get accepted more and more by others in the movement. Since the *CUAC* was formed, the anarchist movement in Chile has grown and has got definitely more mature. We believe that is no coincidence, and that is because of the serious work inside of the popular movement what is a positive effect of new libertarian methods. Probably there was no other way for anarchism to grow and to succeed in organizing, platformism as a needed development in the local movement. But what is certainly undeniable is that our organization, thanks to our positive aspects, and despite some mistakes, has made a great deal in showing the anarchist organization for the struggle as a real possibility, although we are far from satisfied and believe that there is still much more to be done. Our organizational state is still weak, we are still not enough as we'd like, and we would like to have more presence in different social struggles.



**What areas of struggle is the CUAC active? Do you feel that having an organized anarchist group has helped you be more effective in gaining anarchist influence within these struggles?**

**CUAC:** Our organization is active at different levels: it is active on university students problems, participating in students unions and in campaigns against the privatization of universities that has led to some strikes and occupations; it is active in the popular neighborhoods, participating in educational activity and popular radio programs, in community organization and in different local problems; and has some activity in unions, that faced some problems and currently we are doing our efforts to start that work again in an organized way.

Of course the organization has been of great importance, and thanks to that we have been able to multiply the anarchist influence, to give it some coherence and to have a concrete presence with proposals and practical policies. Also, the organization brings more maturity and makes your opinion one you can give some credit to. And not only the organization has been of use or help to the very anarchists, also we believe, it has been of use to the people who we are working with, because a serious anarchist movement is needed in the struggle, and in society.

When we are discussing getting organized, and some so-called anarchists make a big deal because they are afraid of organizations, and you see them so reluctant to organize, so messed up with abstract philosophy, so scared of changing society, it is a bit disheartening. We need a movement to change society, that's the important task and we should never lose sight of that. And to change society we need organization, and thus we have to learn to work with other people and lose the complex of being the centre of the universe. These "comrades" are the ones who give merit to the authoritarian's claims that one cannot supposedly get organized in a libertarian way. And if we have fear to organize, in the end we will be helping capitalism in not playing a mature role in the struggle, and the authoritarians, will once again be the only option left.

**What are some future plans for the CUAC?**

**CUAC:** This year, in fact, our organization has made many plans. But as the most important thing, we hope to expand and strengthen our current struggles, and to become active in new social realities, rallying the inactive anarcho-

communists, to open new fronts for our struggle. On the other hand, we need to keep on working on the activity and organizational structure of the CUAC, for the growing process we are going through, and to continue adapting our tool, that is, our political organization, in the face of the challenges of the agitation and the popular movement, that we will have to deal with due to this ongoing crisis. We are not going to wait to be caught by surprise, but we should rather be well organized and on guard.

We are also going to help, with all of our efforts, in the unity of the Chilean anarchist movement, thanks to the positive signals given by most of the anarchist organizations to develop the links of solidarity, based mainly upon a common class-struggle practice, springing out from the concrete fights. Thus, we hope to be paving the road for an Anarcho-Communist Federation in Chile. And we can't be blind. We know that strengthening our local work, together with the growth of other organizations in Latin America and the rest of the world, are striving to the same goal: a red and black international!!

**Repression is still a strong reality in Chile, with street demonstrations routinely attacked by police. Given this political climate, what sort of future do you see for anarchism in Chile?**

**CUAC:** It is the truth that repression over the last while unveils, once again, the role played by the military dictatorship in the neoliberal adjustment that is now strangling us. Because, even though the terror yesterday was complete and persistent, today under the Concertacion (coalition of government), we have seen nothing but a masked dictatorship, manipulating the news, with censorship, political persecution and murder, under a progressive and even leftist aesthetic of our president Ricardo Lagos. That is a threat, because every fair protest of our people against their plans, they call terrorism, we suffer from the legal repression from the Consitution made under Pinochet's regime. This way, we see that neoliberalism in Chile has had different stages, and we understand Pinochet's regime as one more of the puppet governments settled by the yankee imperialism, and that the current one is not going to change the repressive apparatus, but instead, will make it more

and more perfect. As an example, let's cite the case of the murder of a young Mapuche fighter, called Alex Lemun, in November 2002. Alex perished under police guns while participating in the occupation of the lands of his ancestors.

Cynically, the Home Secretary expressed his "regret for what happened", but at the same time threatened saying that no action outside our current norms and constitution will be tolerated, and if necessary, they will use all their force. One week later, without any serious information in the news, we were visited by USA Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, because of the Fifth Conference of Defense Secretaries of the Americas, in which, despite all their platitudes about defense, it was agreed the coordination of the hemispheric repression to suffocate the popular struggles in America. Then, what happened to Lemun, wasn't it a signal of obedience to the plans of the Pentagon, represented by Rumsfeld?

Well, this is only a glimpse of the repressive situation nowadays in Chile, and the answers should not be found somewhere else than in the collective action of the very affected, the people. Because, in spite of the insecurity, of the constant siege, of the fear to the reaction, we know that if we isolate ourselves from the masses, if we behave like a gang, we are going to be giving the chance to those in power to dismantle our organization. And specially because our principal aim is the generation of the popular power, through all the activity we do in opening solidarity networks, for the people to organize and come together, we should stay there, obviously not leaving the problems of the resistance, of security, of the revolutionary violence to the "meta-physics"; but knowing, at the same time that the answers will come from the heart of our activity. The future of the CUAC is determined by its own principles, and in the end, by the maturity of anarchism as such.

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<http://www.struggle.ws/inter/groups/cuac.html>





# THE ANARCHIST PLATFORM

by Workers Solidarity Movement (Ireland) & Workers Solidarity Federation (South Africa)

## PREAMBLE

The points of the anarchist platform arose from discussion between the Irish *Workers Solidarity Movement* and the South African *Workers Solidarity Federation* (which has now dissolved). Because of this background the points assume a common understanding of what anarchism is. Probably the book 'Anarchism' by Daniel Guerin contains the best detailed explanation of anarchist history and theory from this perspective.

After the dissolution of the WSM the WSM decided to use the points agreed upon to launch the Anarchist-Platform email list. The purpose of the list is to bring together anarchists who agree with the points both for the exchange of information but also in the hope that they will meet up with others on the list in their geographical region and engage in common work. As such list members are expected to actively pursue this agenda and not simply lurk (a common feature of other lists).

## ANARCHIST PLATFORM

We identify ourselves as anarchists and with the 'Platformist' tradition within anarchism which includes groups and publications such as 'The Organizational Platform of Libertarian Communists', the Friends of Durruti and the 'Manifesto of Libertarian Communism' (Georges Fontenis).

We broadly identify with the organizational practice argued for by this tradition but not necessarily everything else they did or said. That is it is a starting point for our politics and not an end point.

The core ideas of this tradition that we identify with are the need for anarchist organizations that seek to develop

- Ideological Unity
- Tactical Unity
- Collective Action and Discipline
- Federalism

Anarchism will be created by the class struggle between the vast majority of society (the working class) and the tiny minority that currently rule. A successful revolution will require that anarchist ideas become the leading ideas within the working class. This

will not happen spontaneously. Our role is to make anarchist ideas the leading ideas or as it is sometimes expressed to become a 'leadership of ideas'.

We work within the trade unions as the major focus of our activity where this is a possibility. We therefore reject views that dismiss activity in the unions. Within them we fight for the democratic structures typical of anarcho-syndicalist unions like the 1930's CNT. However the unions no matter how revolutionary cannot replace the need for anarchist political organization(s).

We also see it as vital to work in struggles that happen outside the unions/workplace. These include struggles against particular oppressions, imperialism and indeed the struggles of the working class for a decent place and environment in which to live. Our general approach to these, like our approach to the unions is to involve ourselves wherever the greatest number are found and within this movement to promote anarchist methods of organization involving direct democracy.

We actively oppose all manifestation of prejudice within the workers movement and identify working alongside those struggling against racism, sexism, [religious] sectarianism and homophobia as a priority. We see the success of a revolution and the success of the elimination of these oppressions after the revolution being determined by the building of such struggles in the pre-revolutionary period.

We oppose imperialism and put forward anarchism as an alternative goal to nationalism. We defend grass root anti-imperialist movements while arguing for an anarchist rather than nationalist strategy.

We identify a need for anarchist organizations who agree with these principles to federate on an international basis. However we believe the degree of federation possible and the amount of effort put into it must be determined on the success of building national organizations capable of making such international work a reality rather than a matter of slogans.

## JOINING ANARCHIST PLATFORM

To join this list please email:  
wsm\_ireland@yahoo.com

Your email should have the subject 'Anarchist Platform' and should include the following:

- (1) A statement that you agree with the points and want to subscribe to the list.
- (2) A short introduction that can be posted to the list saying where your from and what, if any, organizations your involved with.
- (3) Specify whether you want to subscribe to the list or the digest. The digest means you only get one mail every three days containing all that periods posting so it may be better for you if you have limited email access.

If you can it would also be a good idea to subscribe to the list below.

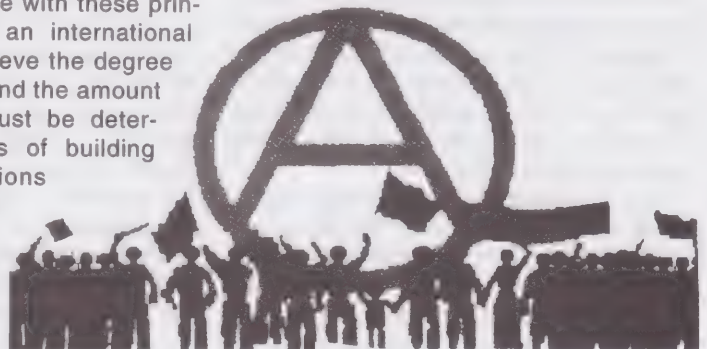
## AP\_DISCUSS

A list for discussing the Anarchist Platform and related aspects of anarchism. If you're new to anarchism or unsure of aspects of the Platform please join this list first and ask questions/ make comments there.

To join email:  
AP\_discuss-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

When you have subscribed post a short introduction message indicating where you disagree with the 'Anarchist Platform', you can do this by mailing:

ap\_discuss@yahoogroups.com





# THE DEMISE OF **LOVE & RAGE** WHAT HAPPENED?

by WEB, Open City Collective (NEFAC-NYC)

The following article is a revised version of an unpublished paper originally written in November 1998. Although two of the three groups mentioned are now defunct, the issues raised in the *Love and Rage* factional struggle are still quite relevant to the anarchist movement today.

The *Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation* dissolved into two groups at a brief final conference in May 1998. One group became *Fire by Night*; it also dissolved sometime later. The other group became the nucleus of *The Utopian* anarchist journal, which continues to publish. The purpose of this article is to draw out the lessons from the successes and failures of *Love and Rage* (L&R) during its nine years of existence.

Despite its ultimate dissolution, *Love and Rage* did have successes. The first is that it lasted as long as it did. Dozens of other anarchist organizations, some rather large, had much shorter lifespans. Second, L&R established a legitimate pole within the anarchist movement for supporting national liberation struggles. On this question L&R caused a lot of controversy in a movement which had been traditionally hostile or abstentionist. Third, *Love and Rage* re-established a pole within the movement for participating in mass struggles and raising revolutionary politics. This was in contrast to strategies which were popular at that time like building "Temporary Autonomous Zones". Finally, L&R also re-established the idea of building an international anarchist organization, as opposed to the cultural and localistic orientations of many groups of the 1980's. Here again L&R caused a lot of controversy, with its opponents labeling the group 'crypto-Leninist' and worse.

The members of *Love and Rage* agreed on the points listed above. But this agreement obscured deep differences. These differences were reflected in the fact that in its entire existence, *Love and Rage* never drafted a comprehensive statement of aims and principles.

The failures of *Love and Rage* were rooted in these differences. The latter in fact represented a split between those who wanted to address the problems of anarchism from within anarchism and those who wanted to adopt the methods and outlook of authoritarian ideologies; in particular, Marxism and Maoism. Stripping away the 'isms', the split in L&R also represents the difference between those who proceed from a vision of liberating humanity through its self-organization, and those who would re-enslave it in the name of freedom by building themselves into a 'scientific' and 'revolutionary' elite.

It is this difference, between authoritarian Marxism, Maoism and Social Democracy on the one hand, and the self-organization of people into a self-governing society on the other, that ran through every aspect of the internal struggle in *Love and Rage*. The questions in that debate revolved around the nature of capitalism and its dynamics, the nature of the authoritarian oppression we face, and the attitudes we should take toward the state and reformism. They also revolved around national liberation, racism, authoritarian Left ideologies and organizing methods. And finally, it should be said that the debate over these topics was often murky and tangential because of a disdain for theory which ran through much of the membership of L&R. I shall take up each topic in turn.

## NATURE OF CAPITALISM

Capitalism is the rule of capital and its agents over those who do the actual work to produce its wealth. Traditionally it has been organized through markets: Adam Smith's 'Invisible Hand' allocated the goods and services produced (and made the holders of capital wealthy). However, the allocation of the social product also could be, and has been, organized by the state. This difference is unimportant as to the nature of the system: a small number of people still control the means of production

while the vast majority, who have no power, do the work.

*Love and Rage* had a tendency to identify capitalism with market capitalism. It did this by equating capitalism with 'neo-liberalism'. L&R newspaper ran numerous critiques of the latter. An article in the internal bulletin flatly defined neo-liberalism as modern capitalism. 'Neo-liberalism', however, is nothing more than old-fashioned market capitalism, an idea which regained popularity among capitalists as their statist economies stagnated in the 1970's. All of L&R's articles described how neo-liberal privatization and cutbacks in social services have created twin poles of misery for many and wealth for a few all over the world. That is precisely what markets do.

The view that the ills of capitalism are represented by the market has also been the view of Marxists and social democrats for decades. Their remedy of state "planning" and control has been their program to gain power for just as long. These measures might sand off some rough edges from capitalism, even change its form, but they do not alter its substance. The ultimate expression of this program is state capitalism, in which the government owns all the means of production.

## CAPITALIST DYNAMICS

State capitalism is a 20th century phenomenon. It has arisen in a period of capitalist decay. Prior to this capitalism had gone through a long epoch of expansion in which it raised the productive forces and gave rise to democratic institutions, at least for a few in Europe and North America. During this period capitalism expanded by subjugating the non-capitalist sectors outside Europe and the Europeanized parts of the Western Hemisphere.

By approximately the turn of the 20th century, however, capitalism had the entire world divided up, and for the first time a new dynamic became dominant. Now sectors of the capitalist world could expand only at the expense of other sectors. This is not to say



## NATURE OF THE AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEM

that capitalism didn't continue growing by increasing the rate of exploitation of its workers, as it had done before. What was new was that it had no non-capitalist worlds to conquer. Thus, in the 20th century capitalist wars became world wars; and for those periods when there was no war, capitalism for the first time brought a permanent war economy with nuclear weapons. This continues to waste vast resources today. And instead of democracy in the Europeanized sectors, capitalism in the 20th century brought fascism, state capitalism, and state-planned genocide. The non-Europeanized sectors fared even worse.

This is also not to say that capitalism cannot ever raise the productive forces and fulfill its democratic promises. What it does mean is that capitalism can only do this on a limited and episodic scale. For example, the market capitalist expansion of industry and democratic institutions outside Western Europe and North America in the last decade comes on the heels of the collapse of the state capitalist sector.

The observation that capitalism has gone through periods of expansion and decay caused controversy before *Love and Rage* broke up. Wayne Price, a member of the future *Utopian* nucleus, originally outlined the two epochs briefly in a response to a muddled article in the *L&R* internal bulletin by Chris Day ('Stakes is High'). Day was perhaps the principal theoretician and maneuverer of the future *Fire by Nighters*. He jumped on this idea in an internal bulletin article, 'Neither Trotsky nor Mao'. Day tried to paint Price as a Marxist: that for him to hold the idea that capitalism has epochs necessarily meant that he also had to believe the Marxist notion that all of human history is driven by class struggles; and that the capitalist class had a progressive mission in its time to raise the productive forces and push forward the idea of human freedom.

Day's argument, however, is false. Tracing the rise and fall of a social system does not make one a Marxist. Nor does it mean that capitalism had a 'mission' or played a progressive role in human history. No matter what its positive accomplishments, a system which was founded on slavery in the West and serfdom in the East cannot necessarily be called 'progressive'.

Moreover, the denial of an epoch of decay also characterizes Social Democracy. That is, if the social democrats are to sell their program of reform, they must also convince people that the reforms will last. Such a vision is increasingly illusory in this age when even U.S. Social Security, civil service protections, and the right to see a lawyer are under attack.

For anarchists oppression comes from a single, multifaceted authoritarian system. Racism, sexism, class, agism and ethnocentrism, oppression by the state, and the destruction of nature are all inextricably tangled together. This does not mean, however, that they are conceptually indistinct. Nor does it mean that all the cracks in the system are the same size. But the idea of a single authoritarian system is quite different from Marxism, which views the class struggle as the primary one which also is the driving force of human history.

It is also quite different from that of Chris Day. Again replying to Wayne Price, he argued in the *L&R* internal bulletin ('More Than Apparent Privileges') that the different subsystems of oppression had their own 'semi-autonomous character and logic'. He conceded that they were related, but made it clear that his starting point was their independence.

This is also not a new idea for Day. It lay behind the argument in his 1994 'Reprole Document', which held that *Love and Rage* should abandon its outlook of speaking on behalf of all humanity and become instead an organization representing 're-proletarianized youth'. That is, *L&R* should only base itself on the oppression falling on this narrow and overwhelmingly white group.

The idea that oppressions are separate is also characteristic of social democrats and Stalinists. They argue that 'socialism' can only be won in distinct stages. First, there must be a bourgeois-democratic (or 'advanced democracy') stage, and only later (that is, never) a revolutionary and socialist leap. The separation of oppressions is also a hallmark of nationalists. Many will hold, for example, that Black people can win their freedom while capitalism still stands. Or even that they can win their liberation through capitalism. The conception is ready-made for those who equate 'revolution' with maneuvering themselves into state power.

## THE STATE AND REFORM

The idea of separate oppressions emerges most clearly in the future *Fire by Nighters* attitude toward the state. For anarchists the oppression of the state is tied up in the whole tangle of racist, sexist and class chains which constitute the modern authoritarian system.

But if one holds to the idea of distinct oppressions, then the state becomes an independent annoyance. For example, Day argued in his 'Reprole Document' that the

basic civil rights of women and gay and lesbian people can be won under capitalism. Aside from being nonsense in an epoch of decay, it implies that the state's 'semi-autonomous' oppression might somehow stand aside while women and gays and lesbians achieved their liberation. It is unknown what Day was thinking when he wrote this, but the idea that the modern authoritarian state would tolerate the breakup of the enforced nuclear family, free access to contraception and abortion, full and open sexuality for all, and equal pay for all is something that even most liberals wouldn't assert.

Moreover, if capitalism is equated with 'neo-liberalism' - that is, market capitalism - then the state may not be oppressive at all! That is the view of social democrats and liberals, who have argued for decades that 'planning' and government regulation can soften the doleful effects of markets gone wild. (This is true to some extent, but only at a cost of causing still other and bigger problems; nor will government regulation eliminate the problems of capitalist markets altogether, let alone bring about human freedom). Future *FbNer* Brad Sigel brought this out most clearly when he wrote in 'My Thoughts on the Debates in *Love & Rage*'.

And more so than other anarchists, *Love & Rage* members acknowledged that there are serious deficiencies in anarchist ideas on how to run a complex society like ours without having some sort of bureaucratic structures that are to some degree separated from or alienated from the people as a whole.

Sigel's statement represents an elitist point of view. Certainly anarchists (and everybody else) will face enormous problems in making a post-revolutionary society function. But Sigel -- together with the others who went on to form *Fire by Night* -- did not start from the point of promoting the self-organization of people. He concedes the 'necessity' of having 'alienated' and 'bureaucratic' structures from the beginning.

Day went one step further. In 'The Historical Failure of Anarchism', he described a revolution which occurred in one country and still faces the world market. In such a situation, Day argued that the 'replacement of the old state apparatus with a new ostensibly revolutionary state is necessary' to secure the 'accomplishments' of his vision of a revolution (emphasis added). 'Worse', Day elaborated, 'the administrative apparatus of the revolutionary regime, whether it is called a 'workers state' or a 'federation of free collectives' is the body that must do the exploiting'.



Certainly an anarchist revolution in one country would face the same world market which Day described. But the self-organized people deciding for themselves to make sacrifices is an animal of a wholly different species.

Moreover, as an addendum to his 'Historical Failure of Anarchism', Day also called for the creation of a regular 'revolutionary army' implicitly modeled on the Chinese People's Liberation Army. The PLA, of course, had nothing to do with carrying out a directly democratic revolution in China, but instead was the military instrument establishing state capitalism.

In a revolutionary situation the capitalists and their allies will promise anything in order to hang on to power. The pressures on anarchists will be very great. In 1936 Spain, for example, the capitalist People's Front promised to free the thousands of anarchist prisoners who rotted in the old regime's jails. It is precisely at such moments that anarchists must have supreme confidence in the self-organization and power of the people and not take responsibility for the repressive measures that the state and the reformists inevitably will carry out.

Day gave a clear indication of where he and his co-thinkers will go when he wrote about the Spanish Revolution. He devoted hundreds of words over three separate articles to criticizing the Spanish anarchists for failing to build an army like the PLA. But coordinating the revolutionary militias was only a piece of the Spanish anarchists' overall lack of a revolutionary strategy. The central failure in that non-strategy was that in the midst of the workers and peasants seizing the land and the factories and forming their own militias to fight the fascists, the anarchists joined the government. On this point Day is silent.

For *Love and Rage* this question of reform vs. revolution, the state vs. the people, played itself out during the Detroit newspaper strike. In the summer of 1996 hundreds of strikers and their supporters fought cops, scabs and gun thugs in battles to shut down the papers. The union bureaucracy, naturally, was uncomfortable about this, preferring to rely for support on the courts, the National Labor Relations Board, and the Democratic Party. In this context *Detroit Love and Rage* issued a leaflet which, among other things, called for a general strike in Detroit to defend the newspaper strikers. Like the union bureaucrats, the future *Fire by Nighters* didn't like this leaflet. They tried to keep it from being reprinted in *L&R* newspaper, calling it 'sectarian', despite the fact that mass meetings of hundreds of strikers and supporters in Detroit had already voted for the same thing. As the song goes, 'Which Side Are You On?'

## NATIONAL LIBERATION

National liberation is not only formal political independence from imperialism, but also economic independence. Carried out conscientiously, national liberation would raise the productive forces in the country, free the peasantry, and promote a flowering of democratic institutions. This is something which a traditional market capitalist class, tied as it is to international imperialism, is incapable of doing. Even in South Africa, which already had well-developed productive forces, the government, which was born out of a long struggle against imperialism and racism, has already junked even the reform program of its own Freedom Charter.

Most Marxist-Leninists would agree with this analysis. They hold that only the working class can carry through a program of national liberation. In particular, they aver that only their Marxist-Leninist party claiming to represent the working class can do the job.

This also is false. A Marxist-Leninist revolution may be able to win national independence and raise the productive forces, but no one is free. What the Marxist-Leninists really establish is a state capitalist regime in which the new ruling class rearranges its bargain with the people. Instead of the rule of the market and formal democracy, instead of wealth for a few and misery for the many, the state capitalists contract for a little less wealth (but no less, and probably more, power) for the few, a little less misery for the masses, and no freedom whatsoever.

This is not to say that anarchists should not support national liberation. As stated, *L&R's* support for such struggles represented a real advance in the anarchist movement. Only if oppressed peoples can throw off their imperialist bindings can they see clearly that they need to go on and do away with their own home-grown rulers, too.

But it came as a surprise when Marxist-Leninist ideas bubbled up like flatulence inside *Love and Rage*. Writing in 'Stakes is High' and 'The Historical Failure of Anarchism', Day went to great lengths to 'prove' that the Chinese Revolution of 1949 'of necessity' had to be state capitalist. That is, because of the economic backwardness of China, the huge numbers of peasants, the tiny size and 'immaturity' of the working class (the same class which carried out several years of general strikes and organized its own defense squads twenty years earlier), the Chinese Revolution had to stop at the capitalist stage. Or carrying the logic one step fur-

ther: the Chinese Communist Party and People's Liberation Army had to stop the revolution at the state capitalist stage.

## RACISM

From the beginning *Love and Rage* was influenced by an analysis of racism and white supremacy based on the theory of white skin privilege. Noel Ignatiev, one of the originators of the theory, even joined the organization for a brief period in 1994. The final issue of *L&R* newspaper cites differences around the theory as one of the central reasons for the breakup of the group. In Day's words:

*"Briefly stated, that analysis holds that a cornerstone of white supremacy (and therefore the whole edifice of authoritarian social relations) in the U.S. and elsewhere is the system of white racial privileges that gives to even the poorest or most oppressed white people certain concrete benefits or preferential treatment that tie them to the system as a whole."* ('Thoughts on Multi-Racial Organization')

On its face there is nothing wrong with the statement. The present authoritarian system really does give all European-descended people certain real privileges, given the structure of the system as a whole. But the analysis is essentially ahistorical. Nowhere in any of the *L&R* writings on white skin privilege is there even a hint that the entire authoritarian system goes through periods of breakdown crises in which the privileges of ordinary white people are threatened also. The logic of this static analysis reached a ludicrous low point just before *L&R* disintegrated. At that time future *FbN* folks proposed that the standard of living of the white workers in the imperialist countries would have to be lowered 'big time'. That is, not only do the corporate bosses want to suck you workers dry -- we do too! And nowhere do they mention their attitude toward the standard of living of the enormous middle class of the imperialist countries.

When the system does break down, white workers can (but certainly not always) realize that their privileges are indeed insignificant. They can join with everybody else in building a united struggle for everyone's benefit. This happened in the '30's with the building of the *CIO* -- a mass, mixed organization -- and earlier with the *United Mine Workers* and the *IWW*. That those organizations did not directly confront racism as a system in itself did not help the struggle against it. The *CIO's* slogan was, in effect, 'Black and White, Unite and Fight!', and it sanctioned segregated locals in some of its



unions. The *IWW* 'made no special demands'. The point here, however, is that the privileges of white workers are both real and insignificant when considered against the dynamics of the entire authoritarian system. And when laid out against the necessary alternative of a revolutionary, cooperative and democratic system, those privileges are insignificant indeed.

One further point: the future *FbNers* never considered that while all people of European descent may get certain privileges from the present system, that white workers are worse off than they would be without racism. If white workers can get the credit and buy the house in the neighborhood that Black people are denied, they can most certainly get more credit, and a better house in a better neighborhood, without the existence of racism. Many scores of years ago thousands of white workers and farmers in the U.S. opposed slavery in part because it was a threat to their own standard of living. There was a reason for that.

Day and others defend the theory of white skin privilege as central to building a multi-racial organization. In fact, if anything, it is an impediment to building such a group. This is not due to the fact that white people in the present system don't have the privileges that Day describes. Rather, it's the point of view of the theory, that it's addressed only to white people; it has nothing to say to anyone else.

What it says to white people desiring to build a multi-racial organization is that before you do anything else, you must first acknowledge your privileges and renounce them. OK, then what? Clearly, it implies that the next step is to try to get other white people to do the same.

There is nothing wrong with this in itself, but it doesn't go very far. As stated, it says nothing to anybody who isn't white. And carried to its logical conclusion, you get existential acts of individual resistance to white supremacy; or the 'whites organize only in the white community (whatever that is)' line which *Prairie Fire* used to advocate. Or it says nothing concrete at all. At the January 1995 demonstration to free Mumia Abu-Jamal in Harrisburg, a couple of people brought by *L&R* carried signs reading 'Abolish the White Race!' Fine sentiment, but almost no one understood it.

There is also an unintentional elitism in the logic of the theory. As *Love and Rage* disintegrated one of the foremost advocates of the theory proposed that members of the organization 'not interfere'; that is, not publicly comment on, issues within the Black community. But members of the community know that some of us who were in *L&R* in

fact do have opinions about all kinds of things that interest them. If we remained silent, they would have rightly thought that either we were hiding something or that we considered them too ignorant to discuss such issues with them. Are Black people incapable of considering our views together with those of other forces in the community?

## AUTHORITARIAN LEFT IDEOLOGIES

Both sides in the debate admitted that anarchism had problems with its theory and practice. But the group which became the nucleus of the *Utopian* believed that the problems could be solved within the framework of anarchism. The other side thought otherwise. They reached into Marxism, Leninism and Maoism for answers, and the problems started there.

Marxism is inherently authoritarian. It is a total philosophical-social-political-economic-historical system of thought. For Marxism, in what it calls 'science', the class struggle has been the driving force of human history. In its view, the historical task of history's latest phase, capitalism, has been to increase the productive forces and bring forth the idea of democracy. But since capitalism also is a class system, the working class would inevitably overthrow it and establish its own state, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The leaders of this state; that is, in modern times, the Leninist party, would rule armed with their supposedly superior scientific knowledge in the name of the workers. It is both this state-rule and the rulers' view that they embody the next stage of human history which makes Marxism authoritarian.

On the other side, some future *FbNers* agreed that Marxism is authoritarian. However, some were not sure, and others declared themselves in fact to be Marxists. Most thought the whole question to be irrelevant, but more on that later.

This jumble is not surprising because, despite Day's protestations, his writing on the subject itself is a model of mud. Day's point of view is clearly outside anarchism. For example, in 'Stakes is High' he wrote that he is interested in 'infusing the anarchist movement with something like the standards of rigorous investigation and argument that

exist fairly broadly within Marxism'. And later, 'Marxism is simply unrivaled in the depth and variety of critical analysis it has produced'. Finally, Day's view that the Chinese Revolution 'of necessity' had to be capitalist also reflects not an anarchist view of history, but a Marxist historical-deterministic one, and a crockeryheaded one at that.

In the European late Middle Ages those who argued that the earth was the center of the universe were confronted with an increasing array of evidence undermining their belief. In particular, those who held that the sun was the center of the solar system could better explain anomalies in the orbits of the planets and moons. But not to give up, the earth-centrists countered that what was really happening was that these heavenly bodies' orbits were going through 'epicycles' and even 'epicycles within epicycles'.

While the ideology of Marxism has a penetrating critique of the development of capitalism, it is wholly unable to come to grips with

those countries in which societies have been established in its name. The anarchist critique of these state capitalist regimes is far more lucid than what Marxism has produced. For example, Trotskyism has for decades been driven by fights over which countries represented 'degenerated', 'deformed' or 'healthy' workers' states.

Stalinism and Maoism have had years of struggles over 'revisionism' and 'capitalist roaders'. All of these epicycles obscure the real picture: in none of these societies do the organized people have power; in all of them the state has established an authoritarian capitalism under its control. (In many of the states there weren't even revolutions; the Red Army marched in establishing a 'workers' state' without the workers).

Anarchist theory too has problems. Its traditional wooden attitude toward national liberation has already been mentioned. Anarchism also has difficulty analyzing the development of capitalism (the 'epoch question'). And like the social democrats, Stalinists and ossified Trotskyists, anarchism also has problems mapping a way between its minimum and maximum programs. Marxism doesn't distinguish itself on these questions, either. Therefore, it is the turn of anarchism to establish a framework within which to analyze these questions.





## ORGANIZING METHODS

Different members of the *FbN* faction each at different times advocated 'mass-line' organizing methods. Derived from Maoism, 'mass-line' attempts to mobilize large numbers of people behind the leadership of an authoritarian vanguard party. While at the time all the future *FbNers* disclaimed vanguardism, this is no longer the case. Then and now the point of view which comes through their mass-line articles is one of how can people who consider themselves revolutionaries orient themselves to get masses of people to follow them?

By itself this sounds innocuous enough. We are, after all, revolutionaries. We want to build as big a base as possible among people for our revolutionary democratic ideas. So naturally we should build and participate in the mass struggle of the people. But what we have to remember always is that our ideas come first.

There is nothing vanguardist or elitist about this. Since the consciousness of the majority of the people in motion at this time is reformist, we constitute a small minority telling the truth as best we know it about the nature of the system and how to defend against it. In meetings we will lose on a lot of votes. Still, we patiently explain and continue to participate.

'Mass-line', however, is a different horse altogether. It is elitist in the sense that it instructs revolutionaries to hide parts of their program in order to lead (presumably) a larger number of people on a reformist basis, because that's the level of present-day consciousness. The fact that one *FbNer* once told me that Mao always was out front in advocating the dictatorship of the proletariat changes nothing. Aside that I don't believe that it's true, even if it were, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' really hides the fact that the real dictatorship is and always has been that of the *Chinese Communist Party*.

Day implicitly admits this deception in his 'Multi-Racial Organization' article when he wrote that 'the development of people's ability to think and act for themselves is more important than the immediate triumph of our particular line on this or that question'. This sounds very nice and democratic, but does it really mean that 'our line' can be an obstacle to the development of peoples' ability to think and act for themselves? There should be no problem here: anarchists' 'line' should always foster the development of self-organization.

My own view of 'mass-line' is that it is essentially the old social-democratic minimum program of what is feasible within the system (not what is necessary for the defense of working class people). This in turn is tied to the Leninist notion of the vanguard party being the leadership of the masses. Further, the Maoist groups also have, on paper at least, the old social-democratic maximum program -- socialism, or the dictatorship of the proletariat (what Mao was supposedly upfront about). It is the lack of a connection between the minimum and maximum, except through the organizational form of the Maoist party itself, which has resulted in their veering - like China - between wooden sectarianism and outright reformism.

Rather than needing 'mass-line' to mobilize the masses, people will mobilize themselves for their own defense as the system breaks down and attacks them. At this stage they will likely follow reformist (or worse) leaderships because this is where their consciousness is. What anarchists need to do is participate in and build the defense while patiently explaining our program. That program must bridge the gap between the minimum and maximum programs. I believe it needs to be an anarchist transitional program.

## THEORY

While people have pointed to anarchism's theoretical weaknesses, another serious problem exists in the anarchist movement, as it did in *Love and Rage*. This is a disdain for theory itself. In *Love and Rage* each side

had a small core of people who wrote and argued about things. In the middle were a much larger number who didn't see the point of it at all. This was also true in 1994 when Day wrote his 'Reprole Document' and proposed to change the name of the organization. Although these were confused pieces beginning the move away from anarchism, only two people wrote replies:

*"I believe anarchism's aversion to theory, however, is tied up with its positive traits. The first of these is direct action and activism in general. Anarchists frequently are on the front lines of struggles against authority. Even the more passive anarchists, who may prefer to build Temporary Autonomous Zones and such, are more concerned with 'getting the work done' than with discussing theory. The problem, which really is a good problem to have, is too much desire to do something without enough thought about where it's going."*

Second is a fixation on 'process' to the impediment of discussing the underlying issues. But this also reflects something else positive about anarchism. In particular, and unlike the historical deterministic Marxists, anarchists see a direct relation between means and ends. Both process and the underlying issues are important.

If anarchism is weak on theory, the answer is not to jump into the seemingly inviting theoretical arms of Marxism. Rather it's to build up the theoretical side of anarchism. Both theory and practice are necessary.

## For Further Reading on the History of Love & Rage

***Nine Years of the Love & Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation***

by Wayne Price [Northeastern Anarchist, Fall 2001]

[http://www.nefac.net/newswire/display\\_any/52](http://www.nefac.net/newswire/display_any/52)

***From Love & Rage: A Look at the Legacy***

by Paul Glavin [Arsenal Magazine, Spring 2000]

<http://www.criminalanarchy.com/glavin.htm>

***After Winter Must Come Spring: A Self-Critical Evaluation of the Life and Death of the Love & Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation***

by The Fire By Night Organizing Committee

<http://www.criminalanarchy.com/fire.htm>



# Collective Responsibility: A Two-Fold Issue

by Mujo, Bete Noire (NEFAC Montreal)

The need for anarchists to organize so that their ideas and practices have some kind of influence on the path to social change is to us self-evident and will not be argued in this article. We'll instead focus on one aspect developed by platformist anarchists: collective responsibility. Firstly, collective responsibility implies that individuals, by joining an organization, in accordance with their unity on a theoretical and tactical level, need to fulfill certain membership requirements and apply collective decisions. Second, the organization as a whole must answer as an entity for the political actions and ideas of all members and is thus responsible for those actions and ideas.

## All Individual Members Are Responsible To The Entire Organization

We are organizing in order to have a real influence in the society we live in, more specifically, in the social class of which we're members, namely the working class. There is no point in deciding to implement campaigns or specific work together and then come back to our respective cities or areas to disregard those decisions and fail to apply them. It should be required of all members that once a decision has been made by the organization in a democratic fashion, not representatively democratic but with a decision making process that involves everyone, that implements that decision therefore giving the organization its usefulness.

The overall action of all members is then greater than the sum of the uncoordinated actions of all the people that share a core of ideas and practices. It allows us as members of the working class to give a common blow to the ruling class. The isolation of anarchists in their specific environment slows down the influence and the spreading of their ideas and practices in the working class. By organizing responsibly we're breaking the vicious cycle of repeating the mistakes of the past as well as preventing us from redoubling our efforts.

In the specific case of NEFAC, the fact that anarchists are organizing across the border, and with a language difference, breaks with the limitations that the bourgeois state imposes on the working class as a whole (i.e. nationality, ethnic background, culture, etc). Implementing common decisions amongst different cultures and nations is a way to counter the tactics of our common enemy who has been breaking our social class coherence by giving each community different status and different laws.

We need, as anarchists, to regroup and come to an agreement around an analysis of the current situation and of what needs to be done. We need to discuss strategy and implement it on the ground so that we will be better able to stifle the efforts of the ruling class and, eventually, move forward ourselves as a class to overthrow the reign of our class enemy, the bourgeoisie.

## The Organization Is Responsible For The Political Activities Of All Its Members

To achieve the coherence previously mentioned, the people who voluntarily joined forces with each other share some sort of responsibility. This common responsibility in turn means that each member group's or individual's political activities have to be shared by all others. Let's make it clear that this second part is not meant to curb the dissidence of minority positions or to stifle initiative of members. Different positions, minority ones included, allow for deeper discussions and thus greater unity in the organization. As initiative allows for the needed flexibility the organization needs to act on local and/or specific issues in an efficient way. What the above statement implies is

that individuals need to be able to answer to the organization as a whole regarding their political activities. If the organization is unsatisfied with the explanations expressed by the member group or individual, the organizational body may take a stand, and, at the most extreme, freely choose to disassociate with the said member. Otherwise, how open the door would be for a traitor to secretly become a member and completely block any progress in the organization.

Differences on minority positions should be allowed until only the minority is ready to take responsibility. This practice is far from being authoritarian because it tries to make a minority come to its position. This process prevents the minority from arbitrarily imposing its will on the organization. Otherwise the remaining members have to defend positions that contradict their opinions within their struggling environment. Without this second part, the "I can do whatever I want" minority would be able to force opinions and associations on the entire group with no way for the majority to review the activities of the said minority.

Political activities, whether in an organization or not, have consequences and repercussions. In a platformist organization there needs to be a consciousness of what other people think about certain political actions. The organization must have a method to call out members on disputed actions. It is not a shameful or authoritarian practice, it is a responsible one.

Finally, to win as anarchists, and to remain faithful to our ideas and principles while still organizing together, we should consider keeping a few things in mind. Every means possible should be taken so that all members can attend decisional meetings. If that is impossible, absent members should be allowed to communicate their decision through clear mandates. The decisions and discussions need to be distributed to all members so they can be applied. Fortunately, nowadays there are many methods by which we can communicate our decisions and have meaningful discussion. Failing to do this can only be seen as a mistake, laziness, or as being done in bad faith.





# BUILD THE CADRE, ABOLISH THE WHITE RACE

By Roy San Filippo, BTR Los Angeles

Last issue we printed a series of essays from both the *Bring The Ruckus* cadre group and members of NEFAC, debating revolutionary strategy and methods of organization. In response, Roy San Filippo, a member of the newly formed national organization initiated by the *Bring The Ruckus* group, has continued the debate, further elaborating the positions of the original *Bring The Ruckus* statement and taking NEFAC to task on a number of key issues. A reply on behalf of NEFAC by Ryan Chiang McCarthy follows.

Although key political differences continue to exist between our respective organizations, we recognize that we each have much to learn from one and other, and welcome this opportunity to continue this important debate around questions of revolutionary praxis. - NEA Editorial Brigade

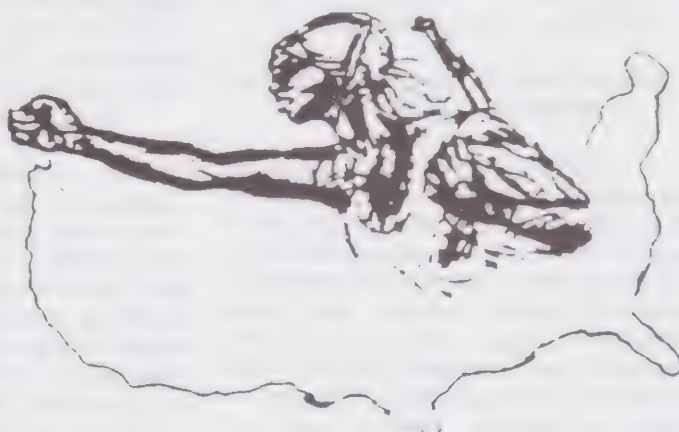
I was happy to see the series of essays by NEFAC in response to the *Bring the Ruckus* (BTR) political statement. BTR was written, in part, to generate political discussion and I am glad NEFAC took the time to engage us. We would welcome and encourage continued discussion of these or other ideas publicly or privately.

I am not one of the authors of the statement, but I am in general agreement with the politics, analysis, and strategies it puts forth. On that basis I would like to respond to Wayne and Nicolas' articles. First, I would like to attempt to define the analytical and strategic positions that I feel BTR and NEFAC have principled differences on. Let me clarify one point: BTR is a class war document. NEFAC and BTR do not disagree on the revolutionary potential of the working class nor do we disagree that white workers are exploited and oppressed as workers or that white privilege offers relative benefits compared to non-white workers. In fact a central feature of BTR is precisely to high-

light the contradictory role whiteness plays in working-class consciousness.

We have significant disagreement on important questions of theory, strategy, and organization. We disagree on the significance of white privilege and the role whiteness plays as a contradictory and counter-revolutionary force within white working-class consciousness. We believe whiteness to be of central strategic importance, not "so-called" privileges, as Wayne characterized it. We disagree on the role of revolutionary organizations and the relationship between conscious revolutionaries and mass movements. We have reached our conclusions based upon our experiences as activists and through careful study of past struggles. We recognize that other groups and individuals whose opinions and analysis we respect will reach different conclusions.

Open, honest, and critical debate within and between organizations and individuals is crucial for the development of revolutionary politics. There are substantive differences between the politics of BTR, the politics of NEFAC, the *Alliance for Freedom and Direct Democracy* (AFDD) and other anarchist organizations. A critical debate between ideas and strategies is crucial, but in order to be effective, we need to base that dialogue



on what each other's ideas actually are instead of distorting them into straw men to be easily knocked down. While it might be rhetorically useful, this does little to advance a substantive and useful exchange.

So first we should clear away all of the straw...

## Wayne's World

Wayne's characterization of our politics as a two-stage process is a cartoon reduction of the Ruckus document and the politics of white abolitionism. So much so that I wondered if it were simply a rhetorical and sectarian attack rather than a genuine attempt to critically engage our ideas. Nowhere in the BTR document is there a claim to first abolish the white race, establish class unity, and then move on to the fight a class war. Rather BTR argues that in the United States, a crisis in capitalism and the state must be precipitated by a crisis in whiteness. While we do not expect that the white race will be abolished before struggles to smash the state and capitalism can effectively begin, it is essential that enough white workers be won over to the struggle against institutionalized white privilege so that the state can no longer rely on skin color as an effective predictor of who is a friend and who is an enemy of this society. This is not a two-stage process by any means. We propose a strategy to engender a revolutionary crisis in the existing system by attacking the institutions of white supremacy. Wayne's rhetorical characterization of this as a supposed strategy is a backhanded dismissal of our ideas and discourages folks from actually considering them. After all, if it is "supposedly" a strategy and not an actual strategy, why bother engaging it at all? BTR does present a strategy; NEFAC simply disagrees with that strategy. An honest assessment of our ideas would acknowledge that fact.

## The Real World

Wayne insinuates the BTR analysis is not rooted in "real life"-again inviting a dismissal of our ideas. BTR analysis is rooted in our analysis of past struggles and our participation in current ones. Take the examples of the Civil Rights movements and the Reconstruction period after the Civil War. In both instances, social struggles grounded in attacks against institutions of white supremacy precipitated broader social struggles. In the case of Reconstruction it brought the United States to the brink of social revolution. We believe that challenging white supremacy today can lead to another revolutionary crisis, opening the way to struggle not just against white supremacy, but all forms of oppression. One may disagree with our analysis, but to dismiss it out right as not being grounded in "real life" is disingenuous and gets us nowhere. Nor do the attempts to



paint us with the brush of Stalinism. Wayne states, "Those who invented this theory (Noel Ignatiev and the *Sojourner Truth Organization*) were Maoists at the time..." This is wrong on both counts. My Mao-dar may not be as fully developed as Wayne's, but as I recall, *STO* was avowedly not a Maoist organization. However the point is moot; the claim that *STO* "invented" these ideas is plainly incorrect as anyone who has read the writings of WEB Du Bois, James Baldwin and other Black theorists upon whom these ideas are based could tell you. There are more productive lines of discussion that could be engaged, instead of pointlessly redbaiting an organization that has been defunct for fifteen years.

### The Role of Revolutionary Organizations

In addition to our disagreements on analysis and strategy, *NEFAC* and *BTR* disagree on the role of revolutionary organizations and their relationship to mass movements. A cadre is a revolutionary formation of individuals who come together around a set of common politics to develop revolutionary strategy and theory based upon study, debate, and a consistent analysis of political practice. A cadre is defined not by this process, but by the commitment of its members to building revolutionary struggles and waging class war. As Nicolas points out, "cadre" presupposes that there are "non-cadre". I would also add that revolutionaries presuppose that there are non-revolutionaries. There are significant differences between cadre and non-cadre just as there are significant differences between revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries. Though I would stress that this difference does not imply a hierarchy, if we are to successfully confront the challenges revolutionaries face in participating in mass movements composed largely of non-revolutionaries with reformist goals, we must acknowledge this and understand the contradictions it poses for the revolutionary process. Nicolas states that *NEFAC* participates in social struggles as "members of the class not as outside agitators." Surely, this is not entirely true; *NEFAC* members are both "members of the class" and "outside agitators." It is incumbent upon revolutionaries to confront this contradiction, not pretend that it doesn't exist.

It is true that we argue for our politics within broader organizations that we participate in. However, I could not disagree more with Nicolas's claim that this amounts to undermining the capacity of mass movements to develop their own politics. There is

a difference between groups and individuals who make principled arguments for their own politics and ideas within organizations and movements and those who seek to undemocratically dominate those movements and organizations. *NEFAC* seemingly sees no distinction between the two. What would be the point of developing a strategy if we refused to argue for it in broader movements? Indeed, what would be the point of having an organization or even politics at all? How does *NEFAC* relate to broader movements and organizations if it does not argue for its particular positions, strategies and politics? Nicolas argues that our desire to develop our own politics and strategies is evidence that we are not interested in broader movements developing their own autonomous politics



and strategies. Are we to presume from this that *NEFAC* doesn't develop its own politics and strategies?

Every organization I have worked with-anarchist or not, cadre or not, revolutionary or not-has developed a set of politics, and then argued for their positions in the context of broader organizations and movements. Not only does this NOT undermine the capacity of movements to develop autonomous politics, it is a central part of the process by which they will develop them. Not only is this not indicative of a belief that ordinary workers are "too dumb to develop politics," it embraces the idea that workers are smart enough to distinguish bad ideas from good ones. We do not believe that we have "oh-so perfect ideas" nor do we believe we possess any kind of truth or correct ideas about struggle. We do believe that we have

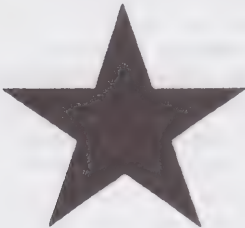
useful ideas, however flawed they might be. As a cadre organization, we seek to develop an internal, democratic, collective process by which we can develop, test and apply these flawed but useful ideas through study and debate, and to disseminate those ideas in broader movements so that they may in turn be tested and developed through struggle and debated amongst other ideas and tendencies. Through this process, we hope to develop ideas that are less flawed and more useful.

### The Problems of Knowing; The Importance of Acting

At play here is more than a critique of a cadre organization but a deeper problem of anarchist epistemology. Anarchists have rightly critiqued the notion embraced by many Marxist-Leninists that there are 'scientific principles' of revolutionary struggle and through their application one can arrive at 'correct' forms of struggle and absolute Truths. (The best articulation of this is Ron Tabor's 'A Look at Leninism'.) The authoritarian implications of this are obvious and should be rejected by anyone interested in promoting democratic principles. The mistake made by many anarchists is to apply this critique of the Marxist-Leninist theory of knowledge so broadly that advocating any political position or strategy is tainted with authoritarianism. Though *NEFAC* as an organization thankfully does not argue this, the temptation to implicitly embrace this position can be seen in Nicolas' argument against cadre organizations. He argues against

the notion of a cadre group internally debating politics and strategies and then fighting to enact them in mass-oriented organizations because doing so implicitly prevents mass movements from developing autonomous politics. This view does more than undermine our capacity to act; it provides us with an excuse not to. It is all too easy to blame this or that "authoritarian" tendency for the failures of anarchist struggles, especially when we continually ignore our responsibility to fight for our politics and take leadership in broader movements and struggles. Such a position on organization relegates anarchism to the role of perpetual gadfly that offers no more than passing critiques of existing movements and struggles rather than being an essential force in shaping a new and better world.





# Reasserting Anarchist Internationalism

by Ryan Chiang McCarthy (NEFAC-Philadelphia)

The essential disagreements between NEFAC and supporters of the *BRING THE RUCKUS* (BTR) statement have been outlined in the previous issue of 'The Northeastern Anarchist'. Briefly, the main points of contention are BTR's call for white abolitionism as a priority for a US anarchist organization, a cadre style for said organization, and a "dual power" strategy.

Roy San Filippo's response has both helped to clarify the issues at hand and highlighted the contradictions of the BTR positions. BTR is a "class war document," and at the same time it prioritizes the destruction of white supremacy for a revolutionary strategy in the US. Responding to criticisms of BTR taking a "two-stage" approach (first, abolish the white race, then abolish capitalism), Roy argues that "In the United States, a crisis in capitalism and the state must be precipitated by a crisis in whiteness." This position, while it may be simplistic to label it "stageism" implies that within the class struggle the anarchist organization must prioritize raising anti-racist consciousness rather than anti-capitalist, class consciousness. If the BTR comrades would deny this, then they must explain what it means to prioritize "white abolitionism".

NEFAC does not deny that combating racism right now is a necessary aspect of the unification of the proletariat. Racism and other divisions exist to drive workers into thinking only of the limited interests of a particular, a classist group pitted against other groups in the same category. Aside from race, these divisions can arise around other issues such as gender or industry. For example, in the US, the recent west coast longshoremen dispute put port truckers, who are paid by the trip, temporarily out of work.

In the logic of wage-labor, the interests of truckers and longshoremen were opposed; the longshoremen were preventing truckers from feeding their families. Racism enters

into similar situations, such as when bosses manipulate immigrant workers to force native workers to accept lower wages or lose their jobs. The conflict then is presented as one between immigrant and native workers - the former are "stealing" the jobs of the latter. The real case, of course, is that the bosses are manipulating workers so as to better exploit them all. Racism is therefore not an institution that stands for itself but rather a very useful tool in the hands of capital.

White supremacy is not an immutable institution. Nothing is sacred under capitalism, and peoples who are vermin one day may be respectable the next. Consider the oppressive conditions Irish immigrant workers were subjected to in constructing the US railroads from the east coast. To the capitalists, it was more cost-efficient for an Irish worker, paid in meager wages, to be killed in dangerous working conditions than for a black slave to suffer the same fate. Today however Irish are considered white, largely by virtue of their utility in enforcing white domination over black workers after the American Civil War.

Nor is white supremacy the only form of racism existing in the US. For example, though there is little distinction made between "Asian-Americans" in white supremacist eyes, there are distinct tensions between various Asian immigrant communities. Chinese and Japanese Americans, who have long been established in the country, hold substantial privilege over southeast Asian immigrants, such as Cambodians and Vietnamese, who arrived more recently as refugees and many of whom live in extreme poverty. In Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Seattle, Cambodians are currently being deported under flimsy pretexts and have depended largely only on their own communities to offer them support. Many of the East-Asian dominated "Asian-American" groups, pretending to represent all Asian

communities, have been more concerned with offensive t-shirts from Abercrombie and Fitch; the livelihoods of Cambodian workers being less important than deepening the East Asian niche in American society.

Divisions of labor are the substance of imperialism, which diverts the proletariat from class struggle by forcing it into national conflicts and relative hierarchies. Less dramatic divisions follow the same process on a smaller scale. So, if we are to advance the unification of the proletariat, we can't merely focus on combating one particular division (white supremacy) within one country (US). The United States may be the leading world superpower at the moment, but this status is dependent on the cooperation of numerous lesser states, some with white supremacy within their borders, others with homogeneously non-white populations. NEFAC embraces internationalism as a basic principle of anarchism; we are a federation of anarchists from northeastern US and eastern Canada and we contend that an anarchist revolution must extend internationally or else it will be crushed.

It's not enough to foster a "crisis in whiteness" in the "American working class" (a contradiction in terms) to precipitate this revolution; white abolitionism isn't even an adequate strategy for fighting racism in conjunction with class struggle. It will be necessary, for instance, to overcome the dominance of anglophone Canadians over francophone Quebecois, which, as Nicolas Phebus indicated, is a more central issue than white supremacy in Quebec. The dominance of Han Chinese over Tibetans and ethnic minorities in China will have to be demolished, as well as the oppression by Ethiopians over the Oromo population. Above all, what's needed is a crisis in all national identities, and a spread international class consciousness in the proletariat. To prioritize the destruction of white supremacy



is to move decisively away from a class struggle perspective to an American one.

*BTR's* position therefore pigeonholes it into a national program that may help explain the advocacy of a "cadre" organization. When the entire focus is on American workers and not the international proletariat, the lines become blurred between a class struggle and national-oriented movement that is not particularly class oriented. Roy defines the cadre as a "revolutionary formation of individuals who come together around a set of common politics to develop revolutionary strategy and theory... to building revolutionary struggles and waging class war." Roy presents *NEFAC's* position as stating that we should not openly advocate our politics within organizations of the wider working class, which is untrue. What is objectionable in the *BTR* program is this notion of "building revolutionary struggles" to constitute a "dual power" which suggests that the anarchists are saviors who start revolutions.

The assertion that the anarchist organization is a part of the class and not an outside agitator is based on the fact that anarchism is not a fancy idea coined by philosophers but the programmatic expression of the interests of the working class. Revolutionary struggles therefore cannot be built by a cadre but arise within the class war with the anarchist organization as the programmatic reference but not as the sole initiator.

The meaning of this is perhaps best illustrated in the question of the proletarian power that arises with the revolution. *BTR*

concerns itself primarily with those struggles that have "the potential to work toward the building of a dual power." It then gives Copwatch as an example, so it seems clear enough that *BTR* aspires to build the "dual power" before the revolution by constructing associations that anticipate it. The problem with this strategy is that the revolutionary power, which we perhaps could better refer to as the Soviet, can't be defined by any particular organizational form but by the act of the proletariat violently overturning the rule of the bourgeoisie and establishing its own power to the exclusion of all non-proletarian elements. As the *Friends of Durruti* declared, "the revolution needs organisms to oversee it, and repress, in an organized sense, hostile sectors...such sectors do not accept oblivion unless they are crushed...we must proceed with the utmost energy against those who are not identified with the working class." The Soviet therefore is a stage of class consciousness and class war coinciding with the revolution, and therefore any organ that aims to anticipate it can only be an imitative formality. An institution such as Copwatch may help stem the excesses of



police brutality, produce a sense of security within a community, and give this community some control over itself, but none of this is necessarily revolutionary. The real Soviet will arise largely from struggles that previously were not consciously striving to establish such a power, which learned by hard fights

that the only way to end the misery of capitalist society is revolution.

Revolution, therefore, is not built by the anarchist organization but arises with the class struggle in which the anarchist organization operates as the theoretical pole. Because of this, we must work with the actual manifestations of class consciousness today and aim to push them

towards revolutionary internationalism. The central point of this process must be considered the workplace, where the proletarian condition is defined, and then from there radiate struggles such as poverty and immigration which are intimately tied to the workplace. It is important to understand the working class not in an abstract sense of poor communities that will form popular assemblies but in the full sense of a propertyless class subjected to wage labor, which can in no way escape its misery except by the destruction of capitalism.

## Anarchist! Get Organized!

Capitalism Won't Abolish Itself. It Needs Your Help. Join The Federation!

*NEFAC* is a bi-lingual (French and English) organization of revolutionaries from the northeastern region of North America who identify with the communist tradition within anarchism. We oppose all forms of oppression and exploitation, and struggle for a classless, stateless, non-hierarchical society.

We are not a party, or a self-proclaimed vanguard, and we do not see ourselves as an organization that will lead the anarchist movement, nevermind lead the working class to social emancipation. We recognize that a successful revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class itself. However, we believe this must

be preceded by organizations able to radicalize mass movements and popular struggles, combat authoritarian and reformist tendencies, act as a forum where ideas and experiences between militants can be discussed, and provide a vehicle for the maximum political impact of libertarian communist ideas in our region.

We are not a large organization, and we have no pretensions about our importance. However, we are convinced enough of our ideas to want to spread them as widely as possible. If you agree with our politics and support our activity, please get in touch!

Yes, I am interested in *NEFAC*.  
Please send me more information.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please fill out, and send to:

*NEFAC* c/o Roundhouse Collective  
1621 Fleet St., Baltimore, MD 21231



# Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists

by Dielo Trouda Group, 1926 (*Workers Solidarity Movement*, 1989); 34pp. \$5

As revolutionary anarcho-communists, we rely on the platform to guide the functioning of our federation, our internal relationships, the functioning of our collectives, and our relationship with other anarchists. We do not, however, harbor any illusions that it is an error free document that should not be reviewed critically. The Platform was written in a social reality that has more differences than commonalities to our present day North American social reality. With this in mind, we approach a critical review of the Platform with the hopes of preserving the tenets of the Platform from which our organizing efforts can benefit, while simultaneously discarding many of the irrelevancies of the same document. In the spirit of continuing the debate on the Platform among anarchist-communists, we submit this modest review.

The preface and historical introduction by members of the *Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM)* is essential and helps readers understand both where modern adherents of the platform are today as well as the historical conditions that the pamphlet was written under. The history of the Russian revolution and the roles anarchists, including the authors, played in it before being repressed by the Bolsheviks is only sketched briefly, but it provides a clear illustration of where the authors of the pamphlet are coming from. We are also given a short history of the platformist tradition shows how small a tendency it has been. Credit has to be given to the WSM for promoting the platform over the last twenty years, which has led to the largest influence that it has ever had in the international anarchist movement.

The introduction centers on the authors' frustration with the "chronic general disorganization" of the anarchist movement. The Platform puts forward that the lack of organization is because of theoretical problems within the anarchist movement, the main one being an absence of responsibility. There is also a firm rejection of synthesism where individuals who hold differing conceptions of anarchist philosophies, "...each having a different conception of all the questions of the anarchist movement", are in the same organization. The platform instead argues for an anarchist organization with "...precise positions: theoretical, tactical and organiza-

tional. The more or less perfect base of a homogenous program." The platform was meant to be a "skeleton" for the program that they hoped their proposed "General Union of Anarchists" would expand upon.

The general section makes up the bulk of the pamphlet and is broken down into several parts. The first point is class struggle where they argue, "In the history of human society ... class struggle has always been the primary factor which determined the form and structure of these societies". This analysis is incredibly simplistic, short and is a woefully inadequate summation of much more complex social relations. It is necessary for modern class struggle anarchists to expand upon this point, analyzing how patriarchy and white supremacy and other oppressions stratify and divide the working class.

Also, within the Platform, the sham of bourgeois "democracy's" collaboration with the ruling class is naturally rejected. However, the concept of direct democracy, one of the principles of anarchism, isn't differentiated, making it a confusing point, a better word would have been electoralism.

The authors harshly criticize the theory that the state can be a weapon for the working class in their struggle for emancipation:

*"The state, immediately and supposedly constructed for the defense of the revolution, invariably ends up distorted by needs and characteristics peculiar to itself, itself being the goal, produces specific, privileged castes, and consequently re-establishes the basis of capitalist authority and the state; the usual enslavement and exploitation of the masses by violence."*

A large part of the General Section concentrates on the role of the masses and anarchists in social revolution. It starts off stating that the anarchist conception of the mass' revolutionary potential is markedly different than that of statist. While statist can only conceive of the masses performing a destructive role in social revolution, that of destroying the capitalist social order, anarchists see that people are fully capable of running the new society themselves.

The platform then lays out the basic strategy for the anarchist movement both before and during a revolutionary upheaval. In the pre-revolutionary period the strategy is two-fold. One of creating specifically anarchist-communist organizations (like NEFAC) for theoretical development, producing propaganda, and fighting the battle of ideas within the working class as an organized group. The second main task for anarchists is that of organizing workers and peasants at the points of production and consumption. In other words, the building of a revolutionary class force that is capable of both seizing economic power from the ruling class and re-organizing production, distribution and consumption during and after the revolution.

During the revolution "The role of anarchists in the revolutionary period cannot be restricted solely to the propagation of the keynotes of libertarian ideas." The pamphlet goes on to state:

*"It [the anarchist organization] must manifest its initiative and display total participation in all the domains of the social revolution: in the orientation and general character of the revolution; in the positive tasks of the revolution, in new production, consumption, the agrarian question etc. On all these questions, and on numbers of others, the masses demand a clear and precise response from the anarchists. And from the moment when anarchists declare a conception of the revolution and the structure of society, they are obliged to give all these questions a clear response, to relate the solution of these problems to the general conception of libertarian communism, and to devote all their forces to the realization of these."*

The Platform also upholds the sheer insanity of any sort of "transition period" or "minimum programs":

*"Anarchists have always defended the idea of an immediate social revolution, which deprives the capitalist class of its economic and social privileges, and place the means and instruments of production and all the functions of economic and social life in the hands of the workers".*



What we understand "minimum programs" to mean is the same as 'reformism'. That doesn't mean that fighting for reforms (such as housing, better wages, healthcare, or working conditions) is bad, only that it doesn't go far enough and will be absorbed into capitalism and class society.

The next section is on unionism (also known as syndicalism). It is here that we begin to see how historical conditions have changed drastically in the last 76 years. When the platform was written there was a wave of mass revolutionary unions across the world. No such comparable movement exists today, especially in the United States and Canada where revolutionary unionism was always much smaller than trade unionism and hasn't been a mass movement since the 20th century. Even the European revolutionary unions of today are shadows of their former selves never having fully recovered from being smashed during the Fascist period.

That said, the platform makes two essential points about unionism. One that "In uniting workers on a basis of production, revolutionary syndicalism, like all groups based on professions, has no determining theory, it does not have a conception of the world which answers all the complicated social and political questions of contemporary reality. It always reflects the ideologies of diverse political groupings notably of those who work most intensely in its ranks." However, far from rejecting unionism due to its theoretical deficits they "consider the tendency to oppose libertarian communism to syndicalism and vice versa to be artificial, and devoid of all foundation and meaning". They argued that anarchist organizations should participate in unions, not as individuals, but as an "organized force" who "... consider that the tasks of anarchists in the ranks of the movement consist of developing libertarian theory, and point it in a libertarian direction, in order to transform it into an active arm of the social revolution. It is necessary to never forget that if trade unionism does not find in anarchist theory a support in opportune times it will turn, whether we like it or not, to the ideology of a political statist party".

Thus is platformism's basic orientation towards working in unions. The question we face is do we concentrate on tiny revolutionary unions like the *Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)*, or the much larger but thoroughly reformist trade unions? Undoubtedly our influence would be far greater on *IWW*, our puny membership numbers would account for almost 10% of the *IWW*'s total membership, but is it really worth the effort to

join and organize with the *IWW* when the mainstream trade unions consist of millions of workers? Doesn't it make more sense to spread our ideas to the maximum number of workers possible?

The final part of the general section is about the defense of the revolution. In it the authors argue that the main threat a revolution faces is not in the initial overthrow of the ruling class, but in the subsequent reactionary counter-attack. The authors saw from first hand experience, that there will be a civil war between the revolutionaries and the armies of the capitalists. It is for that reason that they argue for the creation of a revolutionary army with a "common" (a euphemism for the more accurate term 'central') command. Now, I think it would be hard to argue with any credibility that regular armies with central commands are more efficient and better able to fight than isolated, part-time, "citizen-soldier" militias.

groups. The militias should come together and form a single military organization with a democratically elected and recallable central command - but should always maintain a high level of autonomy including the freedom to refuse orders. There should also be no rank system with everyone a common soldier.

Most importantly once the civil war is over the central command should be disbanded and the soldiers returned to their homes, fields and factories with their units serving as local irregular militias. The people in arms is fundamental to defending a revolution and the lessons of the forced militarization of anarchist fighting units and disarming of workers' organizations by the Stalinists and republicans during the Spanish civil war (a good 10 years after the platform was written) should be heeded by contemporary anarchists.

That said, the platform does put forth some key points for any anarchist military organization. They are:

*"(a) the class character of the army; (b) voluntary service (all coercion will be completely excluded from the work of defending the revolution); (c) free revolutionary discipline (self-discipline) (voluntary service and revolutionary self-discipline are perfectly compatible, and give the revolutionary army greater morale than any army of the state); (d) the total submission of the revolutionary army to the masses of the workers and peasants as represented by the worker and peasant organizations common throughout the country, established by the masses in the controlling sectors of economic and social life."*

The fact that the platform takes on the subject of anarchist military organization is important and something that is sorely missing from modern anarchist organizations.

This brings us to the "constructive section" of the platform, which outlines the basic principles of how production and consumption will be organized during and after the revolution. A main point of this section concentrates on the peasants; again this is a point where the development of capitalism has changed social reality.

The world has seen a huge increase in the percentage of the population that lives in cities. Modern capitalist agriculture is no longer done by exploiting small peasant families or farmers - it is through the use of massive agribusiness super-farms that use technology - much of which is chemical - unsustainable high-yield practices that leave the land infertile and the exploitation of migrant workers. A peasantry that the authors write about just doesn't exist in a

## ORGANISATIONAL PLATFORM OF THE LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISTS



However, efficiency is only one part of the question of anarchist military organizations. The other is the profoundly political question of if a "regularly constituted military organization" can exist in an anarchist society without being the nucleus of an authoritarian state. We would argue "no." The basis of anarchist military organizations should be the irregular militia consisting of affinity groups of revolutionaries that come together to seize and defend their workplaces and communities.

In times of civil war what is needed is the co-ordination of the various armed affinity



modern industrial society.

However, that doesn't mean that the platform is wrong about the importance of the agrarian question. In fact, it means that more than ever the capitalist class will attempt to starve any revolution to death by cutting off food supplies to the cities. This in fact places an increased priority on keeping supply routes to the cities open, having excellent relations between the city workers and the existing farmers and will necessitate a substantial amount of urban workers leaving the cities to work on farms in order to provide the necessary amount of food for society in a sustainable and non-exploitative manner.

It is striking that for a pamphlet stressing the need for anarchists to become better organized, that the organizational section is the shortest and the most incomplete. However, it does manage to lay down the four key points of platformist organizational theory. That of theoretical unity, tactical unity, collective responsibility, and federalism.

The section starts out with the idea that the platform was the minimum theory necessary to rally the "healthy" tendencies of the anarchist movement into a general union of anarchists. In short, the idea was to form an anarchist international. While this remains a good idea, it is clear that it is premature for the contemporary anarchist movement. First we must have national or regional anarchist

federations of sufficient size and organization so that it makes sense to put the work into forming an anarchist international. Given the platform's often enraged denouncements of the 1926 anarchist movement's lack of organization I speculate that the same case existed then. In short, the Dielo Trouda group was working backwards.

They should have focused on building national organizations before trying to call for an international general union of anarchists. It is understandable, given that the authors saw the revolutionary period they lived in pass by anarchism to the cost of thousands of their comrades' lives, but it remains incorrect.

The first three points of the organization section are brief, I would guess that the authors saw them as common sense positions that had to be noted so nobody would confuse it with the theory of 'synthesis' anarchist organization. The final section on federalism contains one problematic point, that of the executive. It seems impossible to simultaneously rail against democratic centralism in one paragraph, and then go on to state that an anarchist organization should have an executive structure that is responsible for "the theoretical and organizational orientation of the activity of isolated organizations consistent with the theoretical positions and the general tactical line of the Union".

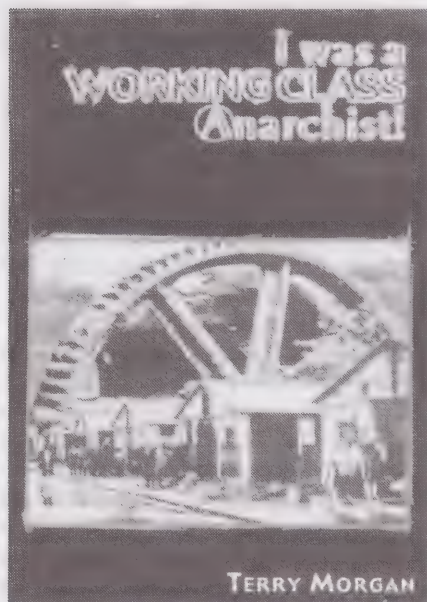
Executives, even in the most radical organization, become a hierarchical leadership position that sets the goals for the organization and lowers participation of the general membership. Yes, specific tasks do need to be filled, such as collecting dues, publishing propaganda, and corresponding with other organizations. But a structure of specific working groups, or rotating responsibility between collectives, branches, or "cells" is preferable and more in line with anti-authoritarian principles than an executive structure.

Overall, the 'Organizational Platform of Libertarian Communists' is a worthy attempt by the Dielo Trouda group to lay a theoretical base for anarchists to form coherent organizations. It remains a useful document for modern anarchists who see it exactly as such, a pamphlet that is worth reading and drawing ideas from - not some sort of holy book. It remains to be the modern anarchist-communists task to expand on the defects of the platform and build the organizations that can form a true "general union of anarchists".

- reviewed by **Mick Black (NEFAC-Toronto)** & **Jessica, Sabate Anarchist Collective (NEFAC-Boston)**

## I Was a Working Class Anarchist

by Terry Morgan (Openly Classist, UK/Paper Street, US) 35pp. \$3



Former *Class War Federation* member Terry Morgan reflects on over a decade in the anarchist movement. Morgan offers a critical analysis of a movement that failed to live up to his expectations, a movement he has since left. Years in various Sheffield anarchist organizations and his later days with *Leeds Class War* led Morgan to conclude that the majority of anarchists are irresponsible, have no desire to communicate their ideas to anyone outside the movement, lack direction, class analysis and that the movement is dominated by the middle-class. It is his belief that any working-class anarchist that is serious about making radical social change, must first leave the anarchist movement.

Perhaps the most powerful statement Morgan makes is in reference to what years in the movement and being part of a middle class clique had done to him:

*"It made it impossible for me to communicate with my own class. It provided me with a vocabulary, culture and lifestyle that differentiated me from my roots - tainted with middle class attitudes. And it has made it harder for me to get back to where I should have been all along". (p.33)*

I disagree with Morgan's conclusion and still believe that the anarchist movement can be re-oriented to working class issues, but he serves up a dose of reality that we all need. He reminds us of the need to step back and examine what we are doing and where it will lead us. Are we really reaching our intended audience? Is this the most effective way to go about this? Dedicated working-class anarchists, such as Morgan, will continue to leave the movement if we do not address these issues.

- reviewed by **Iron Chef, Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)**



# Quiet Rumors: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader

*edited by Dark Star (Dark Star/AK Press 2002); 120 pp. \$15*

If anarchism 'undefined' is the sprawling body of thought that it is, reaching such polar philosophical distances as rugged individualism on one hand and libertarian communism on the other, then "anarcha-feminism" also covers such a vast political terrain with fuzzy boundaries. Whether anarcha-feminism is really Radical Feminism, or Situationism with a feminist bent, or a post-Leftist post-feminism, one never seems to know in this anthology. Of course, its contents are only a reflection of what anarcha-feminism has so far produced, and cannot be blamed. And it is successful in the publishers' ultimate aim, which is to reopen the door on the anarcha-feminist question and revive this debate which never really developed much beyond its once promising beginnings. So what do we have in this anthology? Well for one it is very beautifully put together. Despite its lack of chronology, I will start with the oldest articles - contributions from such foremothers as Voltairine DeCleyre, Emma Goldman, and Charlotte Wilson - the latter being a hero of British anarchist-communism at the turn of the century we ignorantly do not much hear of in North America.

Unfortunately, none of the first wave anarcha-feminists really write about women in particular or feminism in these articles, save Goldman. They are fine examples of anarchist writings of their day: DeCleyre's prose and poetry always well wrought even when describing something as awkward as the various 'isms' of anarchism; Goldman's timely "A Woman Without a Country" attacks the repressive state of affairs surrounding the government's deportation mania; and Wilson's "Social Democracy and Anarchism" shows once again how much ahead of her time this woman was. Wilson was a close comrade of Kropotkin in the late 19th century and along with others in the anarchist circle of the Fabian Society, brought anarchist-communist ideas to England. Her prolific writings were exercises in convincing the average person in the common sense ideas of anarchism, but she had a thoughtful eye in analyzing everyday social relations as they related to grander philosophical ideas. This latter part is where she is especially valuable

to feminists, I believe, and echoed sentiments of the 1970s anarcha-feminists almost 100 years earlier. "The key-note of the anarchist contention is that the vitiation of social life is produced by the domination of man by man. The spirit of domination is the disintegrating element, which, constantly tending to break up society, is the fundamental cause of confusion and disorder." Similar to the "Tyrannies" debate found later in this anthology, Wilson writes: "We are often keenly aware within ourselves of a desire to rule some fellow-creature, who tempts us by his servility or his feeble defiance; of a sense of equal social relationship towards another who meets us on a ground of equality and equal self-respect; or of an instinct of self-defense called out by the aggressive personality of a third. It is this personal experience which is leading us to a clearer conception of the true meaning of the strife we see around us."

We can apply Wilson's acute understanding of domination to a feminist framework, with the help of the second wave anarcha-feminists, but it was Emma Goldman (yes, even despite her often over-glorified position in anarchist histories) who wrote the most about specifically feminist issues. In perhaps one of her most famous pieces concerning feminism, "The Tragedy of Women's Emancipation," Goldman tries to tackle a number of issues at once, and is sometimes misunderstood for her adoration of the "mother instinct" and other "woman-nature" attributes that make me cringe more than a little. Firstly, her criticism of the narrow feminist demand for the vote is as always, accurate, as is her criticism of the emancipated

woman's "progress" as mere limited access to main-stream society. In this, Goldman sees women sacrificing their "inner life" in order to achieve equality. This is no emancipation, she writes, and would rather women found happiness in love and child-rearing than in the restrictive conformist unemotional life of the "emancipated woman" as defined by a few Puritan-like souls. Liken this to a contemporary example such as the unrealistic expectations of the "Super Woman" ideal of the 80s, in which women were supposed to succeed in a career, have a happy marriage, run a household, and raise children - and do this all without having a mental breakdown. This ideal quickly

became transparent to feminists as being more work for women, and clear to working class women all along that class lines would limit careers, and they were juggling working, and raising families, and keeping a house all along and had never found this very liberating. It becomes clear, then that it is the economic system that must change if

women are to ever find equality in the public realm and happiness in the private life. This is what Goldman means when she aims for "the reorganization of our social life, based upon the principles of economic justice."

Overall, I think better examples of these theorists' position on female emancipation could've been included in this anthology. DeCleyre, for example wrote and spoke extensively about the oppression and exploitation of women: "Let every woman ask herself, Why am I the slave of Man? Why is my brain said not to be equal of his brain? Why is my work not paid equally with his? Why must my body be controlled by my husband, giving me in exchange what he deems fit?" Why just include her "Making of an Anarchist" which is primarily about Kropotkin?

Also, a better example of Goldman's true position about her vision of freedom of women could have been included. In the same collection of essays as "The Tragedy", she wrote: "Her development, her freedom, her independence, must come from and through herself. First, by asserting herself as a personality, and not as a sex commodity. Second, by refusing the right of anyone over





her body; by refusing to bear children, unless she wants them, by refusing to be a servant to God, the State, society, the husband, the family, etc., by making her life simpler, but deeper and richer. That is, by trying to learn the meaning and substance of life in all its complexities; by freeing herself from the fear of public opinion and public condemnation." These words clear up any muddled thoughts on "woman nature" that may be got from the essay in *Quiet Rumors*.

The reader rather yearns for some historical context to these essays, essays which span vast differences of opinion - it is hard to imagine Wilson's class-based essay being the theoretical foundation for the resolutely anti-organizational pieces which begin the book, for example.

These essays, the original 1970s/early 80s era articles remain the theoretical foundations to this thing called "anarcha-feminism" that they have always been (though this is probably because not enough is getting written today - but that's another topic for another day). But often you have to remind yourself of the historical context of the times and ignore the rhetoric - "the coming socialist Sisterhood," for example; and suspect definitions such as "Socialism means all the groovy things people can do and build together..." But remember how groundbreaking this was at the time: the inevitable clamoring collision between the New Left and second wave feminism was bound to produce a little silliness. Let us not forget how blatant the hypocrisy of sexism on the Left was, how much women at the time had to put up with just to be part of the movement. This, I think, is what fueled the rant-like aspects of some of these articles, a characteristic which tends to discredit them. The utter poverty of sound political analysis is a rational critique of them, however. Such as in "Feminism as Anarchism" by Farrow, we have at first a brief history of feminism as it is co-opted by other liberal or progressive movements - sound warnings for a feminist movement, but the author destroys any other possibility of positive advice by romanticizing anti-theoretical components of Feminism, reveling in "our disinterest in theoretical speculation" and "our distrust for logic" (see p.19). This is horrifying, even more so than the romanticization of midwives - what next, Goddess worship as a revolutionary act? Farrow's insistence on "situationist based" feminism was the strong point of feminism, but this became a pit-fall when the movement has become a liberal platform for single-issue demands. This anti-Leftist, anti-theoretical slant perhaps has what has gotten us in this mess in the first

place - the vacuum of new and challenging ideas and action.

Kornegger's "Anarchism: the Feminist Connection" on the other hand does try and follow the thread of where history, feminism, and anarchism intersect. Importantly the author makes the argument of why feminism needs anarchism "Challenging sexism means challenging all hierarchy - economic, political, and personal. And that means an anarcha-feminist revolution." Feminism, to succeed, must become revolutionary and anarchist. Kornegger shows how the consciousness raising groups of the late 60s were "practicing what anarchism preaches" and rightly shows how they fell short in often restricting their growth to nothing more than a therapeutic function. This was the context from which sprung the 'Tyrannies' debate. When groups wanted to move on and take direct action or organize campaigns, they "found the 'tyranny of structurelessness' could be as destructive as the 'tyranny of tyranny.'" I think Kornegger is right to say that "what was missing was a verbalized anarchist analysis. Organization does not have to stifle spontaneity or follow hierarchical patterns." Most importantly she tackles the "where do we go from here" question, understanding the long-term process of revolution and destroying patriarchal attitudes and oppression.

Ehrlich in "Socialism, Anarchism, and Feminism" similarly elaborates on the meat of the controversy around the "Tyranny" articles, which are of course included in this anthology. Her over-emphasis on Situationism is misplaced I think, though speaks kernels of truth in her analysis of the "housewife as commodity;" the necessity to reinvent social relations and how this so closely involves women; women as passive consumers, etc. (women as both the consumers and the consumed). Back to the "Tyrannies" again, for they are thrown around even in current debates that it is essential to understand their context. Depending on what strain of anarchism one is proscribed to these days, one "Tyranny" critique may be more favorable than the other. To those trying to build anarchist organizations, Tyranny of Structurelessness certainly rings true, and the response in "Tyranny of Tyranny" misses the mark [no, I cannot liken anarchism to masturbation, thank you very much!]. Yet the latter was seen as the "anarchist" response - one which explained the value of small group organizing and the important struggle against the "inner tyrannies" of domination, to which radical and anarchist feminists had biting criticisms. While neither are self-pro-

claimed anarchist texts, they are valuable to us because of the central issue of strategy, tactics and methods. I will not go into the arguments of both in this humble book review, (and any anarchist should have read these already!) but to say it is not recommended to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Even in Levine's rather reactionary and heavily individualist response in "Tyranny of Tyranny," it does remind us of the essential anarchist critique of inner psychological dominations as well as our original effort to "create an alternative to bureaucratic organization." In the end, I think a much more useful response could have come from a clear anarchist position, which both Ehrlich and Kornegger began to do in this anthology but it is not enough.

Finally, one of the best of the more recent articles appears near the end of *Quiet Rumors*: "Make your own Tea" by Alice Nutter. This is like a breath of fresh air I think because it is clearly coming from a working class point of view, and from struggling in a class-based anarchist organization whose feminist work was genuine in its efforts. That Class War's overall performance in the feminist arena is spotty, as Nutter points out, is not shocking (what else is new?) but plainly her critique is part of that organization's development (or demise - it appeared in the last issue of Class War in 1997). And now I am running out of space to write about the best things of this book. Maybe because they are not as frequently republished, but the *Rote Zora* articles and interviews are rather uplifting, just as the newer specimens about the *Bolivian Mujeres Creando*. I will let the reader discover these exciting tidbits for herself, for I am certainly not going to critique the bravery and cunning of the actions of these feminist groups.

To sum up I will refer to the introduction to this anthology, a piece I was hoping to be more lengthy having seen the name of Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz as the author. Ortiz is somewhat of a role model for myself, and someone whom I wish we heard more from. What she does give us in few words is the core importance of this book, which is of consulting "our historic predecessors," because they were indeed "far ahead of anarchist men in their vision of freedom." But also, though too briefly, she offers the lens through which we must look at our present situation: as working class women who must do nothing less than change the world.

- reviewed by Red Sonja  
(NEFAC-Boston)



# Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886

by Caroline Cahm (Cambridge University Press, 2002); 372pp. \$35

After Bakunin's death, without a doubt the single most important exponent of the revolutionary anarchist ideal was Peter Kropotkin. Sympathetic biographers have often regarded Kropotkin as something of a naïve idealist or "gentle rebel". Yet he always maintained that idealism had to be expressed in action - often violent action - which should be in conformity with and directed towards the attainment of a clearly articulated aims and ideals. He was, above all, a man of action and an uncompromising revolutionary agitator. Indeed, the great anarchist historian Max Nettlau remarked that in comparison to other leading anarchist militants of the period such as Elisée Reclus, Kropotkin was "harder, less tolerant, and more disposed to be practical". This is the Peter Kropotkin of Caroline Cahm's study.

Cahm concentrates on the most active period of Kropotkin's career as a revolutionary agitator, a period which began with his commitment to Bakuninist ideas in 1872 and ended with his arrival in England in 1886 after some twelve years of energetic activity first in Russia, then in Switzerland and France. Cahm outlines Kropotkin's ideas and revolutionary practice, and assesses the influence of his life and work upon the development of the European anarchist movement during this crucial period.

What is refreshing about this book is that, unlike many academic studies of anarchist and socialist history, Cahm's extensive research has relied heavily on the anarchist press of the time period (mainly French and Swiss), congress notes and personal correspondence between Kropotkin and a number of his anarchist contemporaries. Many of the

quotes used are translated into English for the first time. What comes out is a more balanced analysis of Kropotkin's ideas and activity of this period, one which dispels previous assumptions and misrepresentations (such as his alleged disregard of the revolutionary potential of the labor movement or uncritical support for 'propaganda by deed') and offers a more accurate representation of his lasting contributions to anarchism.

## From Bakuninism to Anarcho-Communism

The first section of the book traces Kropotkin's theoretical development in the context of the general evolution of the European anarchist movement from collectivist Bakuninism to anarcho-communism.

From his first contact with the Swiss anarchist watchmakers of the Jura Federation in

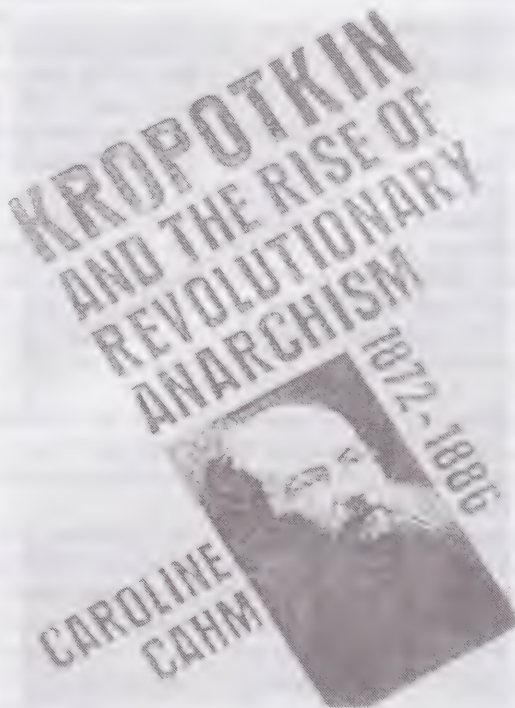
1872 through his return to Russia and subsequent imprisonment for revolutionary activities (which lasted until 1876, when he escaped from prison and returned to Switzerland an *exile*), Kropotkin was an orthodox Bakuninist. In 1868, Bakunin in defining his anti-statist position, had declared himself to be a collectivist, that is he believed in the collective

ownership of land and social wealth, with consumption organized around the distribution of the products of labor based on one's ability to produce (i.e. work).

Although Kropotkin is generally credited as the primary innovator of anarcho-communism, Cahm gives a more historically accurate account. Throughout the early 1870s, Kropotkin concerned himself mainly with revolutionary action and contributed very little to the development of anarcho-communist theory.

In reality it was Elisée Reclus, the French Bakuninist and ex-Communard, who first gave an expose of anarcho-communist ideas at a meeting of the Jura Federation in Lausanne, March 1876. By the summer of that year leading Italian anarchists (Malatesta, Cafiero, Covelli and Costa) had decided to abandon collectivism and to persuade delegates at the forthcoming Congress of the Italian Federation to make a declaration for libertarian communism. The question of the socialization of consumption was raised in a series of articles in the Jura Federation's Bulletin throughout the second half of 1876, and in German-speaking Swiss anarchist circles Paul Brousse began to campaign vigorously for the adoption of anarcho-communism in the pages of *L'Arbeiter Zeitung*.

However, there was still no strong sympathy for anarcho-communism among the mainstream of the European anarchist movement. The first tentative step in this direction was only taken by the Jura Federation at their annual congress at La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1880. At these meetings both Kropotkin and Reclus spoke in favor of an anarcho-communist program, but it was the Italian militant Carlo Cafiero who made the most persuasive contribution to the discussion. He declared that the socialization of capital without the socialization of the products of labor would entail the preservation of the monetary system and the ability to accumulate wealth which, once associated with the right of inheritance, would ensure the disappearance of all equality. The individual apportionment of products, moreover, would result not only in the re-establishment of inequality among people, but also of inequality between different types of work with non-manual labor for the better-off and manual labor for the poorest, a system bringing with it the rebirth of the system of reward and punishment. With respect to collective work, it was in any case impos-





sible to evaluate the individual contribution even in terms of labor as the socialists suggested, for, as they themselves had conceded, everyone was not capable of producing the same amount in a given time. [1]

The only serious objection to communism, according to Cafiero, came from those who, whilst accepting it as an ultimate aim, argued that the shortage of products at the beginning would necessitate a rationing in distribution which would be best worked out on the basis of the amount of labor each individual contributed to production. Rationing, however, he insisted, 'must be organized on the basis of needs and not merits' [2]. He concluded by stating:

*"One cannot be an anarchist without being a communist. For the least idea of limitation contains already in itself the germs of authoritarianism. It could not manifest itself without immediately engendering the law, the judge, the policeman. We must be communists, for it is in communism that we realize true equality."* [3]

***"It is the mass of workers we have to seek to organize. We, the little revolutionary groups, have to submerge ourselves in the organization of the people, be inspired by their hatreds, their aspirations, and help them translate those hatreds and aspirations into actions."***

Despite the reservations of leading anarchist militants like James Guillaume and Adhémar Schwitzguébel, the Congress adopted an uncompromisingly anarcho-communist program for the Jura Federation.

It would be a full eighteen months after the Congress of La Chaux-de-Fonds that Kropotkin began to discuss anarcho-communist ideas in the pages of *Le Révolté*. His first major contribution was in the area of popular expropriation. In November and December 1882, he published a series of articles on the subject, arguing that a libertarian communist revolution would not succeed unless everything that could be used to exploit the people was immediately expropriated and socialized for the benefit of all. Partial expropriation, according to Kropotkin, would lead to the re-establishment of the old order - 'If social wealth remains in the hands of the few who own it now... the insurrection will not be a revolution, and everything will have to begin again' [4]. Similarly, expropriation had to be carried out on a large scale, otherwise it would not be possible to ensure that immediate improvement in the lot of the oppressed,

which was essential in giving the people a real commitment to defend the revolution against reaction:

*"General expropriation alone can satisfy the multitude of the suffering and oppressed. We must take it from the realm of theory into that of practice. But in order that expropriation should correspond to the principle that private property should be abolished and given to all, that expropriation must be accomplished on a massive scale. On a small scale, it will only be seen as vulgar pillage; on a large scale, it is the beginning of social reorganization. [...] The entire means of production must revert to the community, social property held by private individuals must go back to its true master - everyone - so that each may have their broad share in consumption, thus production may continue in all that is necessary and useful, and social life, far from being interrupted be taken up again with the greatest energy."* [5]

By 1883 Kropotkin began to emerge as a major exponent of anarcho-communism, partly because of the success of *Le Révolté* and partly because of the leading role he played in the anarchist trials at Lyon. Certainly, it is likely that he was the principle author of the 'Anarchist Declaration' read out to the court on January 12, 1883, which contained a summary of the ideals of the accused:

*"We ourselves believe that capital, the common inheritance of humanity, since it is the fruit of the collaboration of generations past and present, must be at the disposal of all, in such a way that no one can be excluded; and that no one, on the other hand, can seize any part to the detriment of the rest. We want, in a word, equality: real equality, as a corollary or rather a prime condition of liberty. From each according to abilities, to each according to needs: no prescription can prevail against claims which are both legitimate and necessary."* [6]

Kropotkin spent the next three years in prison for revolutionary activities in France, and was unable to make any substantial con-

tributions in the elaboration of anarcho-communist theory until his release in 1886, when, convinced that effective action demanded a further clarification of the anarcho-communist view regarding the socialization of wealth, he wrote the articles on expropriation which were to provide the basis for 'The Conquest of Bread' (1892). The skill and eloquence with which Kropotkin developed his ideas certainly seems to have secured a general acceptance for anarcho-communism in the European anarchist movement throughout the 1890's.

## Revolutionary Action and 'Propaganda by Deed'

Rejecting the strategy and tactics of parliamentary socialists, the general policy of the European anarchist movement tended to alternate between revolutionary trade unionism and acts of revolt by individuals and small groups. The second section of *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886* primarily deals with the latter forms of action, which were associated with the notion of propaganda by deed and developed out of the failure of insurrectionary action in the early 1870's.

Propaganda by deed is a political slogan which today tends to be associated specifically with isolated terrorist acts carried out by a few anarchists in the 1890's. In fact, the concept, developed in Bakuninist circles in the 1870's, was originally defined as insurrectionalist acts which were intended to affirm socialist principles by deeds. As early as 1870, Bakunin himself stated:

*"Now we all have to embark together on the revolutionary ocean, and henceforth spread our principles no longer by words but by deeds - for this is the most popular, most powerful and the most irresistible form of propaganda."* [7]

In the aftermath of the 1873 Catalanist uprisings in Spain, the French Bakuninist Paul Brousse went further, declaring:

*"Revolutionary propaganda is made not only by the pen and the spoken word, by books, pamphlets, public meetings, and newspapers, it is above all made in the open, in the midst of the piled-up paving stones of the barricades, on days when the exasperated people make war on the mercenary forces of reaction..."*

*From a socialist point of view, we have arrived at the point of action... Let us act, if only from the point of view of propaganda. Perhaps victory will crown our efforts, and if*



*it is martyrdom let us remember that the idea does not perish by the sword, does not fall beneath bullets. Let us never forget that it is the blood of the people which nourishes and makes fertile the ground of Revolution."* [8]

It was Brousse who later coined the phrase 'propaganda by deed' in an article which ran in *L'Arbeiter Zeitung* in December 1876.

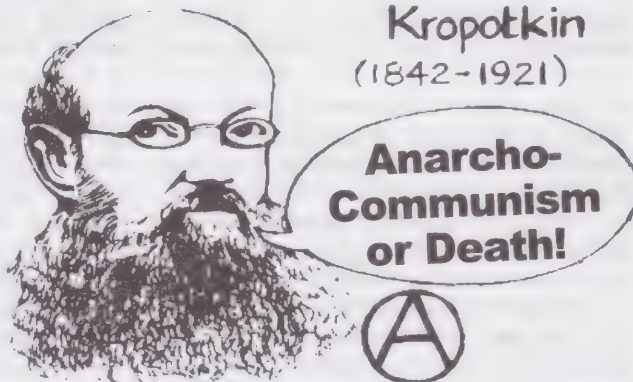
Although Kropotkin always attached a great deal of importance to heroic acts of self-sacrifice to encourage the development of the popular spirit of revolt, he never liked the slogan 'propaganda by deed', and did not use it to describe his own ideas of revolutionary action. On the contrary, in his mind this slogan implied that action was to be undertaken as a publicity stunt rather than as a genuine act of revolt against oppression. Nevertheless, from the very beginning of his revolutionary career he was preoccupied with the necessity of action in addition to oral and written propaganda, and he certainly supported the forms of action adopted by the early advocates of propaganda by deed.

In 1879, Kropotkin outlined his ideas for a program of action for the anarchist movement in a document entitled 'L'idée anarchiste au point de vu de sa realisation pratique' for the Jura Federation's *Bulletin*. He identified three phases in the revolutionary process - a preparatory period, which would be followed by a period of ferment which, in its turn, would lead to the period of transformation (the revolution itself). He then suggested a program of anarchist action appropriate to each of these phases. [9]

During both the preparatory period and period of ferment, Kropotkin declared that anarchists would need to concentrate their efforts on widespread propaganda (by both word and deed) in favor of expropriation and libertarian communism. Once the period of ferment had begun, revolutionary ideas would spread much more quickly, at which point anarchists should take advantage of any opportunity to agitate among workers around all questions of everyday life in order to 'awake the spirit of independence and revolt'. During the revolution itself, the duty of anarchists would be one of direct action, that is, a policy of revolutionary activity that would incite popular expropriation among the masses.

Expropriation and anti-capitalist revolt were common themes in much of Kropotkin's writing during this period. Even during the early 1880's, when, for a brief

period he became less preoccupied with collective action and began to show a greater enthusiasm for acts of revolt carried



out by individuals and small groups, he was still more interested in economic, rather than political, forms of terrorism. For inspiration he turned to the proliferation of spontaneous acts of revolt - popular riots, archive burnings, refusals to pay taxes and rents, and the burning of plantations and factories - in Spain and Italy. He saw in these acts a spontaneous awakening among the masses which would lead to a general insurrection.

In an effort to revive the International Workers' Association, a congress was held in London in 1881. This was to be the infamous meeting of international revolutionaries where propaganda by deed was formerly adopted as a strategy and tactic. As a majority of delegates accepted that the aim of the Internationalists should be to create 'a powerful instrument to attack society violently and defend revolutionary interests', debate centered on strategic questions over which forms of struggle anarchists should prioritize in their revolutionary program. Malatesta argued that more importance should be given to the struggle against governments, because it was the State which maintained and protected the system of economic oppression. Kropotkin flatly rejected this proposal, declaring that a narrow political struggle against the State implied the creation of a hierarchical party of conspirators to take power and declare revolution. "If we think, for example, that it is enough to overthrow the government, to put ourselves in its place and decree the revolution, we could set ourselves up as an army of conspirators, with all the characteristics of the old secret societies with their leaders and deputy leaders." He maintained that a future revolution would be sabotaged by the bourgeoisie unless the masses themselves struck at the system of private property.

Contrary to Malatesta's vision of a conspiratorial revolutionary organization, Kropotkin argued that the role of the International should be to organize among the working class and help translate popular hatreds and aspirations into anti-capitalist revolt:

*"It is the mass of workers we have to seek to organize. We, the little revolutionary groups, have to submerge ourselves in the organization of the people, be inspired by their hatreds, their aspirations, and help them translate those hatreds and aspirations into actions. When the mass of workers is organized and we are with it to strengthen its revolutionary idea, to make the spirit of revolt against Capital germinate there - and the opportunities for that will not be wanting - then we shall be entitled to hope that the next revolution will not be conjured away as the revolutions of the past have been: then it will be the social revolution."* [10]

Although Kropotkin did not hold a majority position among congress delegates, he held firm to his ideas throughout the proceedings. He rejected the view that conspiratorial struggle against governments could result in the destruction of the power of the State; he believed that this could only be brought about by a genuinely popular struggle to destroy the economic system which gave the State its power and *raison d'être*, and argued that the primary role of anarchist revolutionaries was to organize among the working class.

The draft declaration of the 1881 London Congress which was finally adopted made some accommodation to Kropotkin's position, but stressed, above all, the importance of propaganda by deed and the study of bomb-making. Kropotkin remained critical of the positions adopted, although he never officially disassociated himself from propaganda by deed, he immediately set to work writing a series of articles for *Le Révolté* which elaborated on his own positions around the question of revolutionary action.

#### Kropotkin and the Unions

The last major section of Cahm's study should be of particular interest to anarcho-communists, as it reflects an important debate which continues to this day. It deals with the relationship between revolutionary anarchists of the period and the growing trade union movement, with a particular focus on Kropotkin's critical attitude toward unionism.



The revolutionary self-activity of the working class has always been a central feature of anarcho-communism. However, there has been some ambivalence towards the organized expression of this self-activity found within trade unions. The trade union movement, for all its potential for mobilizing the masses, has often tended to be moderate in its aims and hierarchical in its organization. Nonetheless, most of the early anarchists of the Jura Federation argued in favor of trade unions as an important means to build up working class power against capitalism through organized militancy and practical international solidarity. The one exception would be the Italian Federation, who, still favoring insurrectionary methods of struggle, declared trade unions to be 'a reactionary institution' and denounced partial strikes as 'diversionary activity'.

Despite Kropotkin's early enthusiasm for the radical workers' associations of the Swiss Jura, he held serious reservations about trade unionism in general, particularly the trade union movement which was beginning to emerge in England at the time. In a series of articles which appeared between May and July 1877 in the Jura Federation's Bulletin he insisted on the necessity for an organization of workers using revolutionary methods and imbued with revolutionary aims (that is, a total rejection of legal action and short-term aims), and argued against the parliamentary reformism associated with the English trade union movement.

It was not until the violent U.S. railway strike of 1877, which took a near insurrectionary character, that Kropotkin began to seriously consider the revolutionary potential of trade unionism. This increasingly sympathetic position was further reinforced when he visited Spain for six weeks in the summer of 1878. According to Max Nettlau, Kropotkin derived a new inspiration from his rediscovery of the revolutionary spirit of the old International in Spain which seemed to have disappeared from among the trade unionists in England, Belgium and the Jura [11]. It was after his visit to Spain that Kropotkin began to urge a more clearly defined policy of revolutionary action -- both inside and outside the trade unions -- on the Jura Federation.

Around this period, Kropotkin wrote a series of articles in *Le Révolté* entitled 'L'organisation ouvrière' which were addressed specifically to the labor movement. These articles denounced legislative reforms (such as the ten hours bill) and the participation of French trade unions in the forthcoming elections, and insisted on the need to develop workers' organizations to wage a relentless war against capitalism.

Although highly critical of the increasingly reformist direction of the French trade unions, Kropotkin was still optimistic about their revolutionary potential and fought hard against parliamentarianism in the labor movement. He saw the proliferation of strikes (which, by now, increasingly involved violent confrontations with the forces of the State) as a means both of developing the popular spirit of revolt and spreading anarchist ideas among the working class, and called for greater anarchist participation in trade unions so as to not become isolated from the labor movement.

He explained that "while the trade unions stuck to the illegal ground as prohibited organizations, and proceeded by strike and by force, they constituted a terrible power that the employers end up respecting. Once the unions had secured legal status and had abandoned revolutionary tactics the movement had turned into a fourth estate made up of an elite of labor which had become a mere attachment of the liberal bourgeoisie and which was content to limit its demands to the microscopic reforms contained in liberal party programs" [12].

A resolution about trade unions (which seems to reflect Kropotkin's ideas of this period) was passed at the Jura Federation's annual Congress of 1882 which stated: 'The Congress, recognizing the great utility of every workers' organization, declares solidarity with every strike and every struggle on the economic ground'. The previous preoccupation with trade union organization and the need to form more unions had now been replaced by a concern to radicalize the trade unions from within and to urge upon members the need to develop and intensify the anti-capitalist struggle through militant strike action.

Despite Kropotkin's preoccupation with trade union organization and militant strike action during the early 1880's, he firmly rejected the syndicalist view among many Jurassians, which considered trade unions as the basis of the new society. He was unwavering in his view that 'the Commune' (local urban and agricultural communities) would act as the basic unit in the future libertarian communist society, and disliked the vision of society narrowly based on workers' organizations. To this day, this is one of the main theoretical distinctions between anarcho-communism and anarcho-syndicalism.

## Conclusion

Overall, Cahm's *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886* is an important contribution to the historical study of Peter Kropotkin and the impact he had on

the revolutionary anarchist tradition during its most important period of development. By relying primarily on the anarchist press from this period (most notably, *Le Révolté*) and personal correspondence, Cahm is able to provide a more accurate study and analysis of Kropotkin's ideas -- his contributions to anarcho-communist theory and overall revolutionary praxis -- within their proper movement context. Cahm is a generally accessible writer, managing to cover fairly complex ideas and detailed history without falling victim to overly academic theoretical muddle or a dry list of dates and events. With that said, it is unfortunate that, do to its expensive cover price (\$35), *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886* will not be widely read by Kropotkin's intended audience (the working class!) and will instead collect dust amongst the inactivity of privileged academic circles.

- reviewed by MaRK, Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston)

## Notes

- [1] Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886*, pp. 56-7
- [2] *ibid*
- [3] Carlo Cafiero's report to the Jura Federation entitled 'Anarchy and Communism', 1880
- [4] 'L'Expropriation', *Le Révolté*, November 25, 1882
- [5] 'L'Expropriation', *Le Révolté*, December 23, 1882
- [6] 'Déclaration des anarchistes accusés devant le tribunal correctionnel de Lyon', *Le Révolté*, January 20-February 3, 1883
- [7] 'Lettre à un Français', in Michel Bakounine sur la Guerre Franco-Allemande et la révolution sociale en France
- [8] *La Solidarité Révolutionnaire*, July 8, 1873
- [9] Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886*, pp. 125-6
- [10] Kropotkin, quoted from the London IWA Congress notes
- [11] La Première Internationale en Espagne, pp. 307-8
- [12] 'La Ligue et les Trade Unions', *Le Révolté*, October 1, 1881



## Union Bashing From The Ultra-Left

I read your article in *The Northeastern Anarchist* #5, "Voices of Anarchist Union Organizers." Boy, was I impressed! I eagerly await a series of similar articles, I can see it now: "anarchists as social workers," "anarcho-communists as small business owners," and, one guaranteed to bring sentimental tears to the eyes of the people at *Anarchy* magazine, "anarchists as doormats for the Stalinists in the Spanish Civil War."

Unions (some unions, anyway) were once defensive organizations for working people. In their day, anarcho-syndicalist unions were among the best expressions of working class antagonism to capitalism. But the evolution of capitalist society has compelled all unions to become auxiliary organs of capitalist exploitation, and the unions that couldn't adapt to this were driven out of existence, or rendered irrelevant, like the current-day, Potemkin-Village version of the *IWW*.

Unions exist to negotiate the sale of their members' labor power to employers, and to keep their members from getting out of line - and there is nothing potentially liberating in this. Sixty years worth of labor legislation has turned these business organizations into law-enforcement mechanisms of the capitalist State. All over the world, a central role of unions is to police labor disputes. This was true of the CIO in the United States in the 1930's. But this could also be seen in the counter-revolutionary actions of the *CNT* during the Spanish Civil War, and later with *Solidarnosc* in Poland in the 1980's.

As one of America's greatest union leaders, John L. Lewis, put it in 1937, with a precision and coherence you'll never find in an anarchist publication:

"Contrary to communism, syndicalization presupposes labor relations. It is based on the wages system and fully and wholeheartedly recognizes the institution of property and the right to profit stemming from investment."

From World War II to the current holocaust in Iraq, unions in the United States have enthusiastically supported every episode of mass murder committed against working class people in defense of US business interests. Unions defend the profit requirements of individual employers and of the national economy as a whole at the expense of union members in particular and the working class as a whole. Unions have successfully pedaled a false sense of middle class consumerist identity and individualist ideology to a significant segment of the

working class. Unions always, without exception, act to restrain and defeat union member's struggles when those struggles threaten to get out of control. And now that American capitalism no longer needs a large, relatively well-paid proletariat, unions are in the forefront of attacks on the wage levels and working conditions of unionized workers. For example, look at the recent give-back contract of West Coast longshoremen, and the sacrifices demanded of United Airline employees.

This isn't a question of "bad leaders"; this is fundamental to what the unions are, to the role they must play in today's society.

Many working people in the US and Canada who have had first-hand experience with unions are hostile to unions because they have seen how unions are cops for what the bosses want. A great deal of supposedly reactionary hostility to unions by working people is based on real experiences of what the unions do to them. The union apparatus exists to keep union members in line. Unions are a part of the system that fucks us over. Unions are openly hostile to or indifferent to our needs. Leftists, anarchists and other a-historical types who spread illusions about the unions are cheerleaders for the organizations of working class defeat.

All union leaders, rank and file functionaries, economists, elected officials, and most intelligent business leaders recognize the inherently conservative and capitalistic function of unions. Only a few clueless leftists don't. And union functionaries are often happy to have leftists do their donkey-work for them; union functionaries aren't idiots; they are politically sophisticated enough to know that no amount of shit-work by leftists can alter anything about what unions are and what unions do.

The essence of what unions are about is shown in a sequence in the film 'Roger and Me.' Having negotiated away the livelihoods of tens of thousands of Michigan auto workers, the *UAW* is described as having plans to retrain some of its remaining members for jobs as prison guards. As prison guards, these *UAW* members will oversee the imprisonment of other former *UAW* members whose vanished auto industry jobs have driven them to turn to crime to make a living. There are no depths to which unions won't stoop in their service to the bosses against the working class.

Unions have played a completely reactionary role in the class struggle for many decades. That's not going to change because some *NEFAC* members close their eyes and click their ruby-red Doc Martens together three times while chanting, "unions don't really pimp us to the bosses, unions don't really pimp us to the bosses..."

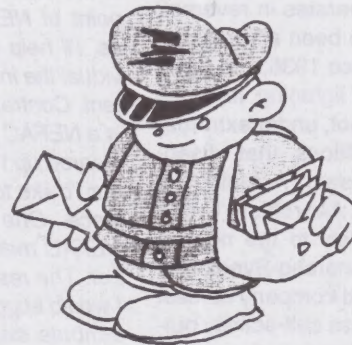
The proletarian rejection of unions is a product of the real struggles of the wage-slave class against the world of wage labor. It's telling that Chekov Feeney appears to base his faith in unions on the dismal reality of Ireland, where the working class has

no track record of going beyond social democracy, as opposed to what was seen with the workers assemblies movement in Spain after the death of Franco, and in Italy in the 1970's, and in France in May 1968. These are situations where millions of working class people have challenged capitalist

society in major struggles. A central element of those upheavals has been an awareness, among a sizeable number of combative wage-earners, that the unions are against us, that unions are on the same side as the bosses and the government in attacks on our wages and working conditions. Action outside-of-and-against-the-unions have been a part of smaller social struggles, too, like in the strikes and unemployed movement in France in 1995. As wage earners in North America, we have a lot to learn from this - and nothing to take from a pro-union perspective.

A commitment to organized, long-term, collective action outside of and against the unions is the only authentic anti-capitalist perspective in workplace struggles today. This is a fundamental dividing line between the real enemies of capital and the state, and the left-wing of capital's political apparatus; social democrat, Trot, anarchist, or whoever. The article on "Workplace Resistance Groups" from the UK *Anarchist Federation* offers an excellent starting-point for what we really need to be doing:

"Such groups must not seek to be alternative unions; they must be anti-capitalist, anti-company and act outside of the union structures and all political parties...The important thing is that such groups have no official dealings with the union (even though members might be in the union)...Their aims





should be to hammer the company as effectively as possible and to link up...with similar groups."

Every real enemy of capitalism all over the world is against the social democratic perspective on unions put forward by NEFAC and Chekov Feeney/WSM. (See, among others, the Anarchist Federation and *No War But the Class War* in the UK, *Wildcat* and *Kolinko* in Germany, *ORAS-Solidarita* in the Czech Republic, *CRAC* in Bologna, Italy, *Ta Padia Tis Gallerias* in Athens, etc, etc, etc.) But why be relevant to the realities of our time, when you can join the ancient mariners of anachro-syndicalism, and experience the satisfaction of being trapped in a time machine that only operates in reverse? Anachro-swindicalism has been all-dressed-up-with-nowhere-to go since 1936; it is a politics of vainly hoping for lightning to strike twice in the exact same spot, under extremely specific historic conditions that disappeared forever 70 years ago. Actually, the politics in "Voices of Anarchist Union Organizers" are qualitatively to the right of Jon Bekken and the 'Anarcho-Syndicalist Review'; since Bekken and company at least claim to be for working class self-activity outside of and against the control of capital's labor brokerages, *AFSCME*, *SEIU*, *UFCW*, and the always-vile *UAW*.

Clearly, NEFAC has a long way to go in developing a politics relevant to the real experiences of contemporary working people, as opposed to the Trotskyist or anachro-syndicalist paleontology museum that you've been borrowing your ideas from up to now.

Anarchists who peddle illusions about capitalist institutions like the unions are, in their own hapless way, active enemies of our struggle to recover our autonomy as a class from capital, a political independence that was lost in the United States under Roosevelt's New Deal. The unions are a part of the same continuum of exploitation and social control as temp agencies and welfare-to-work schemes. I'm sure NEFAC's union organizer members are sincere, but anarchists who work for capital's labor brokerage apparatus might as well be working for revolutionary change from inside the real estate industry. The role played by NEFAC members in capital's union apparatus doesn't make your politics more relevant to today's working class, but it might make you a small part of the problem!

For anti-state communism,  
Kevin Keating  
*Mission Yuppie Eradication Project*  
San Francisco, CA

## NEFAC Responds...

Dear Kevin,

Boy, was I impressed with your letter. I would also like to see articles about anarchist social-workers and even anarcho-communist small business owners. I'm interested in what anarchists do and I think delving into it a little further can show where there are conflicts and poor critique from an anarchist perspective. With this in mind, I think you misinterpret some of the intent of the original article.

First, as is common with pithy, raconteurs such as yourself, you make a huge leap of thought by assuming that any particular article in the NEA necessarily represents the viewpoint of NEFAC. For the slow-witted among us, I'll help out a bit; if it's signed by an individual the individual is responsible for the content. Contrarily, if it's signed by NEFAC, then it is a NEFAC position. With this difficult concept cleared up I'll take responsibility for the article, but I'd like to point out that it was an interview piece. One of the people interviewed is a NEFAC member. A second is a former member. The rest have nothing to do with NEFAC. I would suggest that it usually makes sense to attribute statements and ideas to the people who make them or utter them. An interviewer asks a question, then the interviewee answers the question. If the concept around this process is too difficult to comprehend, feel free to contact me directly (I'm registered on Flag) and I'll explain it further.

Obviously we have different perspectives on Unions. However, I completely agree with some of your critique. In fact, I made some of the same critique in my editorial comments preceding the interviews. Are Unions in the U.S. revolutionary formations of workers? No. Do they have revolutionary potential? Well, yes and no. I certainly don't believe that any particular Union as we know them today will wage war against capitalists and/or the state. On the other hand, workers joining together against their bosses (whether private or public) furthers a consciousness and activity amongst workers that must be in existence to move towards an anarchist social revolution. Not the only thing that encourages this, but one that does it explicitly and rather quickly. In addition, when Union bureaucracy limits the action and intent of workers on the ground in the interest of the boss, then workers learn the lesson well, that the loss of democracy in workers organizations is destructive to them as individuals and their co-workers as a whole.

The bulk of militant worker uprisings in the U.S. (even preceding the Knights of Labor) occurred when workers took control of their

activity in direct opposition to their Union leadership. I'd suggest reading Jeremy Brecher's book *STRIKE!* for some good detail on this phenomenon. Un-coincidentally, Union membership has generally catapulted after militant actions that bucked the suppression by Union leadership. Why is that? Perhaps because workers are savvy enough to understand that without a complete social revolution, they will have to go back to work and will need to be protected from retaliatory acts. Go figure.

If the point of your letter is to say that Unions mediate between workers and bosses, then no shit. That is exactly what they do. Is your point that instead of opposing our bosses collectively, we should suffer the whims and dictates of capitalism until the world rises up and throws off our oppressors? If so, that seems a tad masochistic to me. When you point to examples of "give-back" contracts, are you then suggesting that without a Union the workers would be doing better under unfettered capitalist exploitation? I would most humbly suggest that you rethink that position. I hate to tell you, but most workers, when asked, would like to be in a Union. When boss anti-union campaigns are successful is when organizing drives lose. Why is it that most workers, regardless of a lot of negative realities of Unions, would want to be in one? Why is it that bosses will spend millions of dollars on anti-union campaigns to suppress worker organizing? Why is it that most Union bureaucracies have no commitment to organizing new workers? I have my own opinions, but you think about it.

Anyway, lets actually talk about the article. What was my point in doing it? Well, my point was that I think anarchists should be involved in Unions. Unfortunately, because of a lack of vision and common effort, anarchists have no program whatsoever on what that would mean. So what does a pro-union anarchist do? They either run for office (a dead end strategy for anarchist politics), become Union organizers (another dead end strategy for anarchist politics), or become totally frustrated, pay their dues, and stay quiet (this would also be a dead end strategy if anyone is paying attention). Do I think anarchists should become Union organizers as some form of our strategy? No, and I said so in my comments in that section of the article. Do others? Some do, some don't. I think that part of the interviews showed clearly that there is no anarchist strategy whatsoever and I would argue that one should be developed and implemented. I'm sure you disagree. So what. Don't form a Union.



I would assume you have some good ideas on worker-struggle that don't include Unions. This also has to be part of anarchist strategy on work-place struggles. There are radical and revolutionary forms of worker activity that can be counter-posed to the traditional union model. Councilism, networks, sabotage, etc. What I would support is whatever activity workers can utilize collectively that opposes bosses and can, at least potentially, be successful. These alternatives don't get rid of the Union question though. Unions are still the largest organized force of workers in North America. Often times, they are the first place people come to understand that there is something wrong with the exploitation of their labor. I can't help but believe this is a good thing.

Once we see a positive in Unions, we must then take a serious look at who remain the driving force in regards to worker suppression in the unions. How do workers coming into unions become oriented? The first contact is most often with an organizer. Who are the organizers? Well, they are mostly bureaucrats, liberals and Leninists. I see that as a problem. The role of an organizer is to teach workers how to oppose their boss. I would rather that be done by anarchists than any of the three groups I just mentioned and I see the current state of unions to be, at the very least, some partial fault of ourselves. So, while I see it as bad strategy for anarchists to advocate that we all go become organizers, I also see anarchists as the best possible organizers there could be. Take that sentiment however you will.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank you for your letter. Just to be clear, NEFAC doesn't have a detailed position on worker struggles as of yet. We will have one by the end of our March conference. Please write back when that is made public and you can actually critique NEFAC's ideas rather than base your assumptions on a random interview with people mostly not in NEFAC. Of course your snide remarks against NEFAC, ASR, the IWW and others made my day. I guess all of us anachronists just can't be as revolutionary as you are. Has your decade long poster campaign against yuppies and irrelevant authoritarians brought on the social revolution yet? Let me know when it does. Until then, I'd be much more interested in the work Tom Wetzal and others are doing in your neck of the woods than anything you wheat paste around town.

Duke  
Roundhouse Collective  
(NEFAC-Baltimore)

## Ableism in the NEA?

Comrades,

In the last issue of the NEA it was pointed out to me that the photo of Lenin in a wheelchair with the caption "would you trust a revolution to this man?" was ableist (ableism is regulating of disabled people to a position in society below that of able-bodied people). I'd have to agree.

Lenin should never have been trusted with the revolution, but not because he was disabled after suffering a stroke. Even at the height of his health Lenin was both untrustworthy and counter-revolutionary. He should have never been trusted because we can't trust the revolution to any Party or exalted leader. As the article stated, the only people we can trust with the revolution is the working class as a whole - and that includes disabled workers.

Ableism is a class issue. Disabled people are overwhelmingly poor and working class. Due to ableism they are frozen out of the job market because the bosses think that disabled workers aren't as profitable as able-bodied workers. Jobs they do find are often at a lower wage than the same work done by able-bodied workers. Often people see hiring disabled people as a 'charity' instead of yet another example of exploited labor.

Most disabled people are forced to subsist on miniscule government checks (if they're lucky enough to qualify!), live in substandard housing, and are at a higher risk of becoming homeless. On top of this disabled people face barriers that even able-bodied workers take for granted, for example it's hard enough getting around the city on public transportation - try riding the bus in a wheelchair!

Also, a lot of disabled people are actually casualties of capitalism. After all, who goes deaf from the roar of heavy machines? Whose eyesight is damaged from staring at a computer screen all day? Who loses limbs in machinery? Who throws out their back at work? Who gets carpal tunnel syndrome from typing all day? Who has to wear hardhats to deflect blows to the head? Working people, that's who.

Ableism is an ideology that is profoundly anti-working class. It's an ideology that says disabled people's lives aren't worth as much as that of an able-bodied worker. It's an ideology that sees workers lives and health as disposable. Do you think that there would be as many industrial 'accidents' if the bosses had to pay every injured worker a comfortable salary for the rest of their lives? Ableism props up the ability of the bosses to abuse

workers and then throw us away when we get injured or sick. Ableism is also the idea that disabled workers are "one less person for able-bodied workers to compete with" in the highly competitive contest for a job that pits worker against worker. Ableism stratifies and divides the working class. It is an ideology of the bosses and has no place in class struggle. To see ableism in a class-struggle anarchist magazine shows how far we have to go in combating ableism, both materially, and ideologically.

I'm proud to fight alongside disabled workers in the class struggle. Disabled comrades in both OCAP and NEFAC have shown me without equivocation that the communist maxim of "from each according to their ability" means that disabled people's contribution to revolutionary class struggle is every bit as valuable as that of able-bodied activists, even if it can be different at times.

For a truly libertarian and classless society,  
Mick Black (NEFAC-Toronto)

## Response from the NEA Editorial Brigade...

Dear Mick,

Thank you very much for your thoughtful comments on this subject. We would like to extend a humble apology on behalf of the entire editorial collective to anyone who may have taken offense to the photo of Lenin in a wheelchair and accompanying caption which was printed in the last issue of *The Northeastern Anarchist*.

The intention was certainly not to belittle the social and revolutionary contributions of disabled people, but rather to make a statement about the extreme cult of personality which existed in the Bolshevik Party - a cult of personality that went so far as to entrust a high position of leadership to someone who, after having suffered a massive stroke, clearly lacked much of their former mental capacity. In retrospect this was in bad taste, and we will ensure that it does not happen again.

You are absolutely right to point out the class nature of ableist oppression, and there should be no place for ableism in a class struggle anarchist magazine.

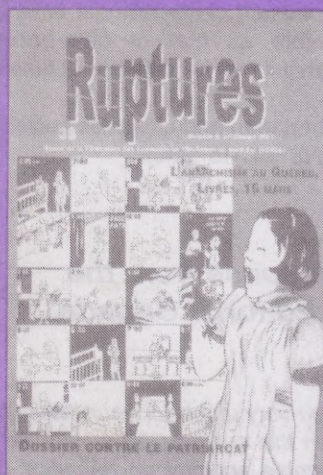
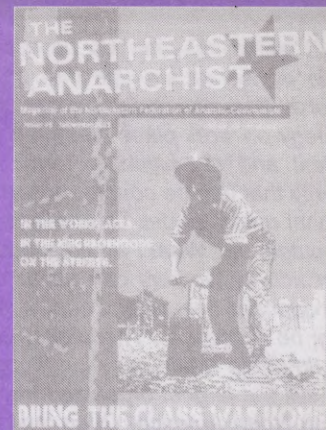
Solidarity,  
NEA Editorial Brigade



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